

BLACK MAGIC

PAUL MORAND

BLACK MAGIC

TRANSLATED by HAMISH MILES

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AARON DOUGLAS



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PRELIMINARY

1895.—Charles, our gardener at Ris-Orangis, shows me the illustrated supplement of the PETIT JOURNAL, wherein a soldier with a sugar-loaf helmet is killing Malagasy. Entry of the French into Antananarivo. First childhood memories.

1902.—I am taken to the circus in Paris. Cake-walk. A couple of American Negroes in Sunday best, with the Olympia bouquet in their hands, prance their way into the twentieth century.

1914.—September : 9 p.m. Senegalese infantry march down the Boulevard Saint-Michel. Direction—the Marne.

1916.—September. Throughout one whole evening a man with a Creole accent, and the monotone of one of Conrad's narrators, opens my eyes to the poetry of the Antilles, the hierarchy of rum. It is Saint Leger Leger.

1919.—Darius Milhaud arrives from Brazil. He describes Bahia, the black Rome, and plays me those Negro SAMBAS which are shortly to serve for the music of his BOEUF SUR LE TOIT.

1920.—I return to France. In the post-war bars. So sublime,

PRELIMINARY

so heartrending, are the accents of jazz, that we all realise that a new FORM is needed for our mode of feeling. But the basis of it all? Sooner or later, I tell myself, we shall have to respond to this summons from the darkness, and go out to see what lies behind this overweening melancholy that calls from the saxophones. How can we stand still while the ice of time is melting between our warm hands?

Away! Away!

1925.—*Jibuti.*

1927.—*Havana, New Orleans, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia, the Carolinas, Charleston, Harlem.—Guadeloupe, Martinique, Trinidad, Curacao, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Alabama, Mississippi.*

1928.—*Dakar, Guinea, Senegambia, the Sudan, the Southern Sahara, the Niger, Timbuktoo, the Mossi country, the Ivory Coast.*

30,000 miles. 28 Negro countries.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I must gratefully acknowledge the valuable help given me by Mr. Walter White, of New York, in the rendering of American Negro speech in certain of these stories.

London.

H. M.

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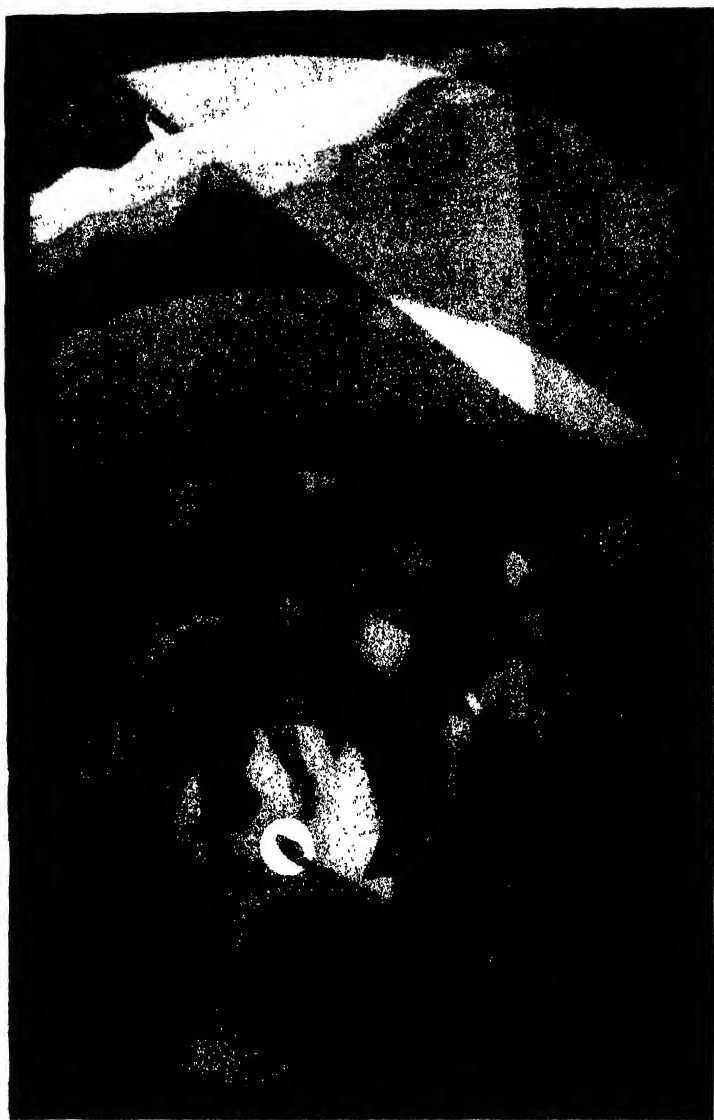
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I

U. S. A.



CONGO

"Oh! to be able to sleep," the Negress said to me, "without dreaming that you're being chased with a spear . . ."

Livingstone

A PARTY in the mansion of the Dukes of Ré, in the Rue de l'Université. 12.45 a.m. A string of motor-cars, above and below the Louis XV residence, from the Palais-Bourbon to the Rue du Bac.

Not until she woke up at midday had Sophie Taylor the Negress, better known as "Congo," decided to arrange a little party. It would be after the dress-rehearsal of the super-revue "Paris-Cochon" in which she was starring.

She sent off two hundred telegrams; and then noticed that she had no furniture in her rooms—nothing but a bed, a gramophone, and trunks. She rang up her manager. Her slippers clip-clopped over the checker of the old parquet floors; she came forward naked, trailing the sixty feet of telephone wire behind her, and her voice echoed in those empty drawing-rooms, all panelled, and vibrant like a violin. Naked: her tall body the colour of iodine, but pink at the knees, elbows and breasts. For centuries her blood had been diluted by chance cross-

breedings, but she herself remained an unbending caryatid, her head erect as that of any Black woman used to her daily burdens. Nothing had succeeded in modifying her ancestral gait; the easy haunches controlled the alternate forward movement of each leg, straight and stiff, while the rest of her body kept steady, in the axis of the face and neck. Congo talked fast, biting the words with her strong molars, tearing them with her white incisors, her body pressed against the uncurtained panes of the ground-floor. (It is doubtful whether the Dowager-Duchess of Ré, since her last lease, still reserved the right of a morning stroll in the Le Nôtre garden . . .)

All day long, and right through the evening, the antiquity dealers of the Rue Royale and the Place Vendôme were unloading pieces of bygone centuries. Lustres like frozen showers were hung from ceilings which hitherto had only dangled electric wires. Congo saw lacquer cabinets arriving, marquetry escritoirs, rosewood whatnots such as the old ladies of New Orleans have, and Clodion figures, Boucher paintings, Caffieri fire-dogs, china-cupboards all complete with their lace fans and fragile porcelain. To-morrow, the tradesmen would take back all that the guests had not broken, or pocketed.

Quarter past one. The whole of Paris, you would think, has been reached by her telegrams, or else has spontaneously regarded itself as invited, for the ground-floor is chock-a-block—a sheep-pen. Paris is no longer spoilt nowadays, and a dance at Congo's—that's an event!

Suddenly the crowd is folded back by a whirl of colour and gesture, preceded by a celebrated laugh. Congo has just got back from the theatre, with her stage-make up and

her stage tricks—"The Most Photographed Girl in the World," as the papers call her. All her teeth, and the arcade of her gums as well, flash from her mouth, and her unwinking eyes thrust forward from their orbits. As soon as this black flag is hoisted, the party sets sail ; the accordion squeezes out its juice, as from a wrung towel, and the trombones draw out their *glissandos*, overpowered by a nasal, aristocratic saxophone. The pack-ice of these Europeans, well-bred, reserved, and fasting, begins to split in all directions. Congo seizes one by the hair, another by the coat-tails, and pairs them off by force. She herself sketches a bar or two of a waltz with a large grim woman who has slipped in to copy dress-models, and then suddenly puts a potted palm in her place between her partner's arms. And round the palm-partnered lady Congo dances alone, squatting like a kangaroo, with splayed legs and clapping hands, spinning round like a top, yet not displacing her plastered hair with that broad parting of hers that looks like a long streak of baldness. A circle of astonishment rings her round. An orange spot-light swoops down unexpectedly : Congo pretends to stagger under the shock of the lamps, or else, when the light turns to white, she makes a show of wiping away the splashes of this electric powder from her dark flesh. Every one of her reflexes is a thunder-bolt, unforeseen and perfect, like an image from a true poet, like a great crime, like a ball taken on the volley. And so, in one night, Paris was captivated and ratified the verdict of New York that "Congo looked like a million dollars." And now here she is, pulsating with the rhythm of the band, following every twist of its syncopation ; beneath the shimmering coat-of-mail that sheathes her, the flesh, that

melody of the body, vanishes in an uncontrollable disintegration: the woman reverts to the skeleton and its eighty-six components; every bone plays its separate part; even her head is now simply teeth and eyes working to and fro; and her knees would surely be shattered in the clash of their impact, if it were not for her crossed arms jerking them apart in the very nick of time.

Congo is eighteen years old, and has been dancing for eighteen years. She is a freak of nature. But her principal gift is not really her dancing, nor her comical powers, nor her exotic grace, nor the grimaces that distort her features, so rounded when her face is in repose, into flashes of geometrical tattooing. No, it is simply the instantaneous transmission of her immense vitality, the discharge of a current more violent than the electric chair's. She has only to show herself, and everything will start moving—people, lights, furniture.

One or two elderly Parisians make their entrance, courteously looking round to pay their greetings to the lady of the house:

"My dear lady, I took the liberty of bringing my friends . . ."

"Yeah. Sure. All brothers and sisters here!"

Congo cannot conceive the possibility of differences between human beings. Servants, friends, workmen, kings—all are brothers, all sisters, all part of the single family of the warm-blooded, the great tribe of the living.

"Allow me to introduce . . ."

"No, no introducing . . . All brothers and sisters."

And the Frenchmen stand amazed, like the raw explorers who gradually discover that their native bearers have as

their brothers and sisters the whole of a tribe, the whole of Africa.

"She reminds one of Josephine," comment the elders. "No, not that one—I mean the Josephine who used to be Empress, long ago . . ."

Congo, laughs, well aware that life passes so quickly that the eye can distinguish nothing but a shape here, a shape there. Proper names only serve to confuse things. To-night in this lofty cabin of the Dukes of Ré, she is heaping up all classes, grinding all races in the mill, crumpling up the sexes, pounds all ages in one mortar; the universe must be shaken up and fermented if it is to express itself and yield a stuff that can decently be drunk. Whatever Congo does, everyone at once imitates; it is infectious, like a disease. To-morrow it will be the right thing to drop one's *r*'s, to lisp one's *s*'s, to change *t* into *d*. Even the sanest will fall into line and make a point of shattering the syntax patiently elaborated by their ancestors, stripping words of the clothes that academics have fitted them with, wedding one word to another in grotesque conjunctions, sending them off both non-suited. And the young sorceress, in her turn, will pulverise the Whites' melodies, in music or politics or sentiment, and force them back to the very beginnings of the world, to the elemental jungle. Under the new-fangled names of fox-trot or camel-walk, she imposes on them the old totem-dances of Africa.

And now, pricked with the potent drug of hand-clapping, black dress-clothes are beating on saucepans, on their thighs, on the taut canvasses of the lesser Dutch Masters, unhooked from the wall. Truth and falsehood, good and evil, property and poverty—all are about to yield their

swift, startling, monstrous fruits. The doubts of the men-about-town are quelled; the prophecy of Congo ("Joy-Congo" as she's also called) is coming to pass—"Paris! I'll make Paris spin like a top!" And Paris laughs its tired, cynical laugh, ingratiated by the primitive merriness of these lively limbs, cheered by these stone-age gambollings, its blood quickened by this organic, unquenchable radiance: can she be ignorant of God's gift to the Negroes of His most priceless treasure—the gift of joy?

And Congo leaps into the middle of supper, her legs in the centre-piece of the table. She flings herself at the head of a *farandole*, and draws it out like a tapeworm; she dances it down to the kitchen, comes up again with the scullery-boys, gathers up the dishwashers and hooks the old scarlet-vested hall-porter as she passes; she brings cats along, and magnetises dogs as well; bursts into the courtyard and captures the chauffeurs; dashes into the Rue de l'Université singing in five languages at once. . . . Then back she comes, loots the cloak-room, and dashes through the drawing-rooms again, with a horsewhip. Wantonly, she flings open the door of her bedroom, makes a business of amusing people with an imitation of a steeplechase jump, ready to finish the trip on the bed, with her legs in the air. . . .

But suddenly she stops dead. Beneath her pillow and its pink bows she has caught a glimpse of something black. She gives a scream of terror, plunges forward, and rushes headlong out. . . .

The party goes on, but without Congo.

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Half-an-hour later, she was climbing through a reek of cabbage up the dark staircase of an old house in the Rue de Calais, on the lower slopes of Montmartre. She knocked at the door of a lodging on the sixth floor ; it was opened by a Negro wearing a brown "derby" and holding a banjo. She went in, without a cloak her pearls knotted behind her shoulders, terror still dogging her steps. Everything that befalls her seems to pierce her instantaneously ; her fear, like her gaiety a moment earlier, was now the channel of an equally violent current.

"Hullo !" he said, standing in the doorway of his den, darkened with cigar-smoke.

"It's come back . . . dirty dogs . . . I'll slash their faces with my razor . . ." she said.

And she flung on to the table the thing she had just found beneath her pillow. It was a queer little hand, cut out of black satin. To the touch it felt as if it were stuffed with powder . . . a sachet . . . with something hard in the middle. It was a—ssh ! don't speak the word—yes : a voodoo ! One of those evil spells left like a gaping trap on your path, by men—or by the devil.

"I saw it in time. Otherwise I'd have gone to sleep . . . And never woken up again . . . D'you remember how the last time they put that thing at my door, I walked over it, and my leg swelled up !"

Without taking off his hat, the Negro put on his gold spectacles, approached the red lamp, and unstitched the object with a pair of scissors. There fell on to the table something that looked like powdered wafer and a small bone.

"See here ! Don't yell like that !"

Congo clapped a hand over her mouth. Her brow was running and she struggled to swallow the Adam's apple rising in her throat.

"Save me, Doc! Save me!"

The witch-doctor continued his examination beside her. In the rim of the half-light, these two Blacks beneath the red lamp were like negatives just showing their lines in the developer. The reverend doctor maintained his plump and placid expression :

"Graveyard dust . . . that's what that is . . ."

His terrific nasal twang was inexplicable, because he had no nose—only the protuberance of lips.

"You can't dodge this—understand? Look out for your life . . . Safety first."

"What can I do?"

"Graveyard dust's a bad thing . . . not much can be done against that . . ."

"D'you remember when I found my photo cut up and pasted upside down on the wall of my dressing-room? D'you remember you gave me a little black glass bottle of vinegar and cloves? And how it stopped the spitting of blood right away? And in February when I had those bad dreams, dreams of rats? They stopped as soon as you told me to cover up my mirrors, didn't they? Help me! My luck's turning already, I can feel it. Somebody's got me by the throat! My London season's ruined . . . If you don't protect me, it's all up . . . Find me *some* charm against it!"

"Some lives just become sterile, like a field when a bad-luck stone is thrown into it . . . Nothing to do just now: the moon's on the wane . . . D'you sleep with your head to the west?"

CONGO

"Yes, *sir*."

The more Congo was in agony, the more long-suffering and phlegmatic did the Negro seem to her, the more secure against fate beneath that thick, invulnerable, porpoise skin of his. To encourage him she handed him a wad of banknotes which she drew from her rolled stocking.

The doctor reflected, and scratched the grey lichen on his skull. Silence. Then rising, he took a silver spoon out of a drawer and thrust it into Congo's mouth. He examined it.

"Silver turns grey . . . You're done for . . . Try to get rid of it, that's all ! "

On her knees on the tiled floor, Congo was howling :

"It's all up ! I'm lost, I'm done for, I'm gone ! "

"Stop that noise ! Howling's not going to help any ! "

He picked her up, limp as a rag, and seated her opposite himself, propping her upright between his knees ; then gazed fixedly into the depths of her eyes. His black hand, with its pale pink lining, stroked her forehead until her eyelids closed.

"I can't do anything more. I'll ask advice somewhere else. Come along . . ."

Congo ran behind the doctor, her feet barely touching the ground. They passed beneath the electric sign of El Garron, and, just beside that, entered a bar with red and white check curtains on its windows ; it was the rendezvous of all the jazz-band Negroes of Paris, the headquarters of the black bookmakers of Longchamps, Ascot, and even Belmont Park. Traffickers in white women and cocaine

(or "happy-dust," as Congo said) were lounging round about. Here the casinos came to recruit their orchestras; from here started the funerals of musicians killed by abuse of late hours, or by galloping phthisis—the black death. The bar was deserted, but the doctor went down a corkscrew stair leading to a cellar: just as in Harlem. The walls, hung with red Turkey-cloth, displayed the portraits of celebrated Negroes—Dumas, Pushkin, Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey—made blacker still by being so flyblown. Congo called to mind, from the lessons of her childhood, a text about the just men taking refuge in the caves from the foulness of the earth. For the moment, the just men were all black, ivory-black, olive mulattos, swarthy quadroons, quinterons, bistre half-breeds, nigrescent Creoles, dingy zambos; only one woman among them, a mulatto with the jowl of a monkey, disfigured by the mauve complexion of her forty years, and wearing a cloak with long sable tails.

Congo realised that the company was waiting only for herself; her appearance drew forth a burst of laughter. And straightway the call to arms was beaten by two or three hybrids seated astride the long, tall wooden drum, scooped out tree-trunks, slotted like money-boxes and crowned with horns like cows. A circle was formed, and fell back spreading like a ripple on water; linked together by inter-locking arms, the coloured people stamped their feet, making the floor shake to the beat of an ever-quickenening rhythm. Soon nothing could be distinguished beyond a roar, an ebony paddle-wheel spotted with the red of smoking-jackets, a gigantic roulette-board with Congo in the middle as its hub. Savagely, in this underground room,

swift hands kept drumming the irresistible mustering of two hundred millions of brothers. Was it a black sabbath of St. John's Night? Congo felt happy in this confined space, intoxicated like all Negroes by the crowd, the thick, exhausted air, the sweet, oily smell of sweating bodies . . .

And now the hideous mulatto woman had seated herself on a box in the middle of the room. What? Had those sable tails of her cloak *really* become rat-tails. . . ? Suddenly the boa that had lain repining round her neck stretched itself, raised its head . . . The cloak fell apart, and showed her swathed in red fillets.

"Jesus! The Voodoo!" exclaimed Congo. She recognised this creature born of the old slave-women's tales and the plantation legends.

The onlookers howled with joy, tore their flesh with delight.

"The King!"

This new personage was red, red as the devil of a Negro Shrove Tuesday, and with a red mask; his horsehair wig, crowned with a red lantern, towered upwards; it seemed to double his size in an instant; his checked kilt was tricked out with mirrors at the corners. It was exactly thus that he came to the Antilles, four centuries ago, out of Africa.

He motioned the serpent back into the box.

"The great Zombi!" groaned Congo.

And here, born again in this basement in the Rue Fontaine, was the great mystery! The thing that the police and all the good works of a white America imagined they had scotched, once and for all, with Marie Laveau, the last Queen of the Voodoo!

With a charcoal circle on the ground, the King marked out his empire.

"Take out your hairpins," whispered the doctor—superfluously. "And take off your clothes."

And Congo was naked again, in all the lissom nakedness of her Guinea ancestors, in all the bliss and integrity of times immemorial. All round her were naked bodies, with raffia loin-coverings and necklaces of teeth. Those religious voices which, that same night, had been edifying the midnight dancing-places with their endless "spirituals," were now booming out the occult chorus, throbbing with a sense of hidden evil beneath its factitious glee :

*"Au joli cocodri
Vini gro cocodri
Mo pas cour cocodri zombi !"*

Glued to her box by the magnetic power of the serpent, the Queen had fallen into a trance ; and now the King was whirling round the heads of the onlookers, spinning the black-and-white checkers of his towering frame like a great teetotum drunk with hazard. From his consort he drew forth the magic fluid of convulsions, and distributed it by touch of hand to the faithful as they begged for talismans or cures. At one moment Congo had a glimpse of the doctor's face, riddled with pins and toothpicks like votive nails, his body doubled backwards on the floor, a bridge between earth and infinity. In her turn, with catlike care, she approached the King as if going near a high-tension wire ; breathed his pungent sweat ; touched him with her finger-tips . . . And instantly she was seized by a frenzy of

C O N G O

lucidity ; she felt light-headed, like someone in the weakness of convalescence ; a torpor descended to relax the terror that had been freezing her : and she even dared to touch the small black hand and the bone, to gain some reprieve from fate. Suddenly she saw . . .

. . . a flat landscape, an immense sheet of water with no restraining banks—the Mississippi ! The scene came jerkily into focus, as in an old opera-glass. To the right was a high embankment, with a ruinous pier, and a narrow beach planted with cypresses and overlooked by a burnt-out fort in the distance ; it was evening, with a storm brewing, and you could hear the alligators. But Congo heard only the paddles of an approaching ferry-boat. The ferry-boat became a bed, and in the bed was nothing but a wisp of pale blue vapour which she recognised at once : it was her grandmother ! What ! Had Mammy Lizzie Dejoye crossed the Atlantic with her bed, to come right to this bar ? What was she saying ? She was calling out with her arms like two strands of orris-root ; she was pointing to the stream ; she was throwing something into it, murmuring : “ All quiet now ! ” And then—a silence, as if hanging over a sentence that is going to be passed . . .

A hand brushed over Congo's eyes.

“ Go,” said the doctor.

* * * * *

“ What else did she say ? Go on, tell me ! ”

“ She said : ‘ Congo . . . she won't get here ! Where's Congo ? It takes a good two months to cross the Ocean . . . ’ And then : ‘ She's too pretty, my little picture . . .

She's been too lucky . . . She's forgotten me, my honey . . . she won't come ! ' And then she didn't recognise us any more ; but she went on talking about you."

" Cut out the sentiment ! " Congo broke in.

" She mixed up this time with the time you went off to New York, two years ago," Mr. Taylor went on ; " ' It's my fault,' she used to say, ' I ought to have gone with her to the Pennsylvania Station . . . Joe's son came back from Harlem rotten . . . it's the devil's city : nobody sleeps, nobody works in the fields . . . Harlem is sin, plain sin . . . ' "

And Congo sobbed. She had left for Cherbourg by aeroplane, dashed across a raging Atlantic, leapt into a special train, but she had arrived too late : her grandmother was dead, the old Creole with her eyes of yellow oil and blood, paralysed, a barely animate object, but the only one that Congo clung to, because it could save her.

" It was, as the sports writers say, a veritable race against time ! "

Mr. Taylor was pleased with his formula, and spat out his tobacco juice, rocking himself, holding on to one foot, in the wooden seat slung by two chains from the roof of the porch. The sun of the April morning hung high over the water-drenched plain ; two ginger cats were playing round the bush of myrtle ringed with an automobile tyre. Congo stood still, just as she had come off the train, in her travelling clothes, an orchid on her breast, her hands filled with the gifts of the lords, the Jewish bankers, the landed princes of Europe. She was silent ; she had no sympathy with her father, whose thoughts were confined to the funeral ; and Congo's brother, a young scamp employed in a garage at

Napoleon, was decidedly in no hurry to arrive: "Ain't manners!" If only there aren't too many coming empty-handed to the dinner! Uncle September from Memphis was a pork-butcher, and he'd certainly have brought a pie along with him—but he died last winter . . . And the Dejoye aunties said they'd be coming to-morrow night from Pointe-à-la-Hache—but would they really be coming in black?—However, the presence of this celebrated daughter gave Mr. Taylor hopes of a big success: her rotogravure portrait had been published, over twelve inches high, in the Sunday supplements. Already the Wild Cats' Brotherhood, to which he belonged, had sent a wreath . . . And, all things considered, the wake over the corpse had been very creditable; there were mourners all night long, and even real tears, and the village had quite distinguished itself by its wails of sorrow.

Congo stamped her foot; she was furious at death having slammed the door in her face like this.

"Didn't grandma say anything else? Didn't she leave a message for me?"

"No! She just kept talking about water; and when she was raving she flung up her arm as if she was throwing something into the water . . ."

Congo would never see her grandmother again except at the church; the body of the dead woman was already at the embalmer's. Here not a trace of her remained, except an old pipe which she used to suck between her toothless gums. And there it lay, on the scrubbing-board.

* * * * *

In the Baptist chapel Congo sat in the front row with the

women, on the left. She wept as she laughed, in fits. The coffin was open, and her grandmother lay there right under her eyes. For a moment Sophie felt her heart soften ; it was that poor old soul who had taught her how to bake potatoes under the ashes, how to talk with animals, how to understand the influence of the moon on your undertakings. Mammy Dejoye brought a touch of French blood with her from the Antilles, and for these poor Blacks of the Delta she stood for civilisation, for the grand ways of Baton Rouge, the town which once was the rival of Natchez. Congo could hardly recognise her ancestress, so dwarfed was she now, shrunk to the size of those dwarf Negroes one sees in the accounts of explorers ; and so shrivelled, poor old woman ; and nearly white too, since the embalmer had peeled her and replaced her blood with an antiseptic paste. They had dressed her in a pale blue gown, and for the first time she was wearing shoes on her feet, instead of carrying them in her hand, as she always used to. The three o'clock sun smote the corrugated iron roof, and poured through the ogive windows cut in the pinewood walls ; through the painted glass lozenges, it made merry patchworks of pink and orange and violet on the Sunday-best congregation, and on the open coffin with its padded lid standing erect, like a white satin tombstone pausing upheld before it should fall over the grave. In front of the altar, a gigantic Bible. This way and that on the dais strode the Negro minister, to and fro like a swinging censer. He opened the Book at the page. Congo stared at this stage devoid of footlights, this scene set for somebody else . . . to the right, a row of deacons, more majestic than magi ; and on the left, the aged deaconesses, handmaidens of the Lord.

The frock-coated pastor slipped his spectacles on to the undermined bridge of his nose ; with sepulchral intonations he announced that his sermon would be drawn from the thirty-seventh chapter of Ezekiel. There was a shudder ; it was the climax. His mouth opened, pink as the inside of a watermelon, in a face the colour of dark beer. After a few sentences, uttered calmly and in an almost unintelligible monotone, he raised the pitch and chanted his prayer.

The voice of the reverend pastor rushed on, followed by the faithful in docile echoing.

He began to apostrophise the assemblage ; he hurled questions at them which exploded like bombs.

“ This sister of ours was a worthy woman, my brethen, but did she think enough of God ? I ask you ! You too—do *you* think enough of Him ? ”

And heartbroken voices, taking the exact key of the preacher’s voice, confessed their fault with an open-throated roar :

“ No ! No ! We *don’t* think enough of Him ! ”

The address went on dramatically, by fits and starts. This sermon on the Valley of Dry Bones had been heard many a time before, but each time it seemed grander than ever . . . The storm was gathering to break. Hoarse and stamping, the minister was describing the onward rush of the two trains, the fast train of God, and Satan’s express, matching their speed to see which would arrive first at the bedside of old Mammy Dejoye. Imperceptibly the preacher passed from impersonal eloquence to appeals, at first declaimed, and then droned out in a curious style in the exact rhythms of jazz.

“ God—has—a—spesh’l—ex—press—train—al—ways—
—un—der—steam—to—dash—to—help—the—just—
man ! Do—you—un—der—stand ? ”

And he was answered by a dull murmur of stifled cries and sing-song groans, which quickly rose to a loud howling.

“ Oh, yes, sir ! Oh, yes ! We un—der—stand ! Oh ! Oh ! ”

So far these were just the customary lamentations . . . But now the two trains were plunging through the valley described by the Prophet . . . Wild-eyed, the minister climbed upon a chair, and from this viaduct he pointed to the depths of Hell. In spite of the untimely heat, he was going to give of his utmost to-day—a tribute to Congo, the ornament of her race. He bellowed until his hoarse voice was breaking. He proclaimed, on his imaginary railroad, the arrival of the divine engine-driver and the diabolic station-master ; he danced the downward rush to the abyss ; he whizzed past the stations that still separated him from the Lord ; he reproduced the bell of the locomotive—all with a crude intensity of faith that recalled the tom-tom, the circus, and the catacombs. Panting and writhing with emotion, the congregation squealed their pleasure and fear. Yet despite the violence of these waves breaking over this black crowd, so ready a conductor of currents, nobody dared to move before the deaconesses. But at last, when it was certain that God was victorious and would bear away the soul of the honourable Lizzie Dejoye to His “ compound,” when the collective emotion reached its zenith, first one deaconess, then another, and then all six in a row, tumbled down like a card-castle, with upturned eyes and

foaming lips, with screams that rent the still air and startled the mules in distant cotton-fields.

"Death's—black—train—is—com—ing! Here—is—Pa—ra—dise!"

And they rolled on the ground, tore their white surplices, lost their cloth bonnets, their gold spectacles . . . They tapped on the coffin: *"Lizzie! Lizzie! Come back to us!"*

The minister opened his arms to their full span. Instantly attention was switched from the possessed women and their gnashing teeth. The hurricane subsided as if by magic; the crowd's cosmic despair, in which only the dead woman remained unaffected, was soothed. A song of deliverance rose up, a *Hallelujah!* like an immense sigh of relief, spontaneous and wholehearted in its aspiration towards heaven, as if bursting from prisoners whose fetters had been struck from their limbs. Every fibre of Congo's being shared in the impassioned zeal of her black brothers, with their souls so white in those dark skins of theirs; she entered fully into the enthusiasm of those primitive creatures who had stood on the brink of Hell, and suddenly, for the first time since the world began, had found a God of salvation. Of Broadway and its lights, of the great boulevards, of the Pariserplatz, of her apotheosis in ostrich plumes and her triple-crested head-dresses, she remembered nothing; she was now just one of the daughters of Shem, a child of the exploited race, sold, thrashed and martyred, the race who have not merited their lot, who can hope for no happiness this side the grave.

* * * *

Deep down in an automobile, with her tapering fingers in

the corner of her heavy lips, Congo was riding along a road which looked like the roads of Flanders as they used to be behind the front. On the right, a twenty-foot embankment, sloping like a roof, was reinforced with sacks of concrete and cushioned with plaited osiers. It was the levee. Lookout-men were pacing to and fro on its summit, scanning the horizon . . . Whom are they watching? Their wars are always with one foe—the Mississippi, the Father of Waters, the stream that rages against its confinement above the plains, the vagabond who longs always to sleep out in the open, under the Southern stars. A sign of spring, familiar to a daughter of the Delta . . . Sun and shadow threw a camouflage over this road skirting alongside the bayous. Congo passed carts fashioned out of old boxes, drawn by mules, piled with the melting snow of cotton, and driven by negroes in aprons hanging by braces from their shoulders, and with battered felt hats; they tugged at the rope reins from where they sat perched sideways on the carts, their feet grazing the passing automobile. She thought of Natchez, where the orange-trees begin, of the slave-dealers of last century with their palm-fibre hats, smoking their cigars and screwing the handcuffs on to the negroes; she pictured to herself those unlucky ones amongst the females, whose outstanding beauty doomed them to serve the passions of these masters; she dreamed of those vanished worlds. . . .

Congo got out of the car, and plunged deep into the fields of sugar-cane thrust heavenward by this indefatigable soil. After the funeral ceremony her family had scattered, leaving her alone, face to face with the future. Ill fortune was no haphazard lot that has befallen her. On the contrary,

it was chronic, just bad luck ; you watched it, you kept one eye cocked on it . . . Luck was the idol she had adored ; but to-day it was her worst foe. The thought that destiny was closing in on her made her furious ; she was maddened by the idea of fate barring her path—she the emancipated, the international !—as it had barred the prison-gates of her slave ancestors. Her triumphant past gave her no sense of security. Always in subjection to the actual moment, she had forgotten Europe, her flabby, goggle-eyed public whom she could go back to when she chose, the wireless telegrams of frantic managers fluttering down on the liner's deck like dead birds, the enormous forfeits she would have to pay. She gave not a thought even to what she loved above all else—her racing-stables ; nor of what she enjoyed so vastly—her exit in the third act to a clash of cymbals, with her head cut off by the glittering guillotine of the curtain—resplendent triumph !

“ Grandma died with her eyes open . . . that means somebody else is going to die . . . ”

She wept : and yet the omens vouchsafed to her by death were so numerous that she had almost grown used to the notion, and it no longer tasted bitter as quinine. She knew quite well that her grandmother was living on that farther side of the earth where the dead live their upside-down life, in a land where the moon moves eastward, where you go downstairs head-first, where black means white and white means black, where you sleep by day and work by night (“ I'll sleep all night and dance all day, I shall ! ” she reflected) ; and she relished the idea, as also the notion that the minister had been talking dead-man's-language in his pulpit when he said that the rich would be poor, and

and the poor rich.' Being poor didn't matter to her in the other world, so long as they would let her dance . . .

Abruptly, Congo gave a start. She thought she was followed; her limp acquiescence in fate was already leaving her. She thought she saw a wolf, and then a cross, both inexorable signs . . . Was she certain that she hadn't counted the number of carriages at the burial? It would mean that she had counted the exact number of days that were left for her to live . . . She screamed in terror, ran forward, and clambered up the embankment to find the river again. Towards her came a number of negroes in ceremonial dress, returning from a baptism, escorting the white-clad candidates fresh from their immersion in the yellow river-mud. Some negro women were shading themselves under the sun-cracked silk of their old umbrellas; on the heels of the ludicrous procession came a few wild horses, neighing . . . Congo burst into laughter: some little girls stared at her with eyes popping out of their heads; they had seen her picture, and had copied those famous curls that put their parentheses round her ears; they dreamed of the day when they too would have straight hair and gold teeth, and go and dance in stockings at Paris (the Paris that likes negroes, not the Texas Paris).

Congo came down on to the level bank, where the corn swallowed her up more completely even than the sugar canes. Scraps of tunes from *Blue Java* at the Ambassadeurs came back to her . . . Who was singing "My Sweet Germaine" with Robinet now? The broad banana leaves reminded her of the posters on the pavements: "*Incomparable Attraction! Seats May Be Reserved . . .*" Behind

the funereal cypresses the sun was going down in a landslide of stormy clouds.

She stopped. Here, at her feet, was a little strip of very white sand, with a deserted landing-stage, and a sign-board . . . how did she know, while still forty yards away, that it read—"Ring Bell for Ferry"?—And suddenly she felt a sensation of terrible strangeness; the future seemed to be adhering to the present . . . That view . . . that landscape . . . it was what she had seen on the Voodoo night in the Rue Fontaine . . . She had come within range of her dream; on the left, the cypresses, the magnolias . . . and now that noise . . . She raised her eyes. The old ferryboat was coming in, painfully steering its course athwart the whirling eddies of the swift current . . . And now she heard the noise of the paddles . . . At last the hour of her deliverance was at hand!

The automobile was driven on board: "You're in luck, ma'am," said the pilot, "you and your car. It's the last crossing this season . . . The water's drifting the trees down. High water's marked at Memphis already: it'll be at Baton Rouge to-morrow."

"Where is Baton Rouge?" asked Congo.

"Why, over there, see . . . That's the State House on the skyline; the sun sets fire to the roofs every evening, as if the Civil War hadn't been enough!"

Congo gazed at the stream, its current so swift that between the unlashings of the hawsers and the starting of the engines the ferry-boat had drifted downstream a hundred yards. There was a sulky smoothness in that water, its surface void of bubbles or foam, holding back all its strength in its strength. The pilot's blue silhouette stood

cut out against pink. They moved forward by jerks. They were half-way across . . . Now for it . . . the moment had come ! Congo pulled out from her blouse the black satin hand which had so long been making her fingers tingle : the small, flat, sinister hand was stiff, like those signals that indicate a dangerous turning . . . Congo stood up in the car, swung her arm, and aimed at the water . . .

“ Wreckage to starboard ! ”

A terrific shock, the hiss of escaping steam ; the boat would split her side stove in ! No, she wasn't yielding, but she was leaning over—with such a list that the wedges slipped from under the wheels of the car. It slid back down the slope, down further, and broke the chain across the stern. Congo screamed ; there was one glimpse of her standing erect in her mourning clothes. . . .

In the heat of the most sublime splash, a foaming apotheosis of the waterchute, with one convulsive wave of the hand, she plunged into the water as into an enchanted palace.



CHARLESTON

*A lover is good for the night-time,
For the night-time,
But here is shining day . . .*

Dwala Song.

I WAS coming back from Nice by road. Two a.m.—and I was taking advantage of one of the few straight runs of the coast road to drive fast, in the direction of Antibes, when just before Juan-les-Pins my headlights lit up a shape lying across the asphalt. I braked on all four wheels, jumped down from my seat, and found an almost insensible woman at my feet. Her face was smeared with blood, and her evening gown was in shreds, showing the torn flesh of her back. She was breathing. She opened unseeing eyes still staring with terror, and with a shudder she cried :

“Take me away from here—anywhere—or they’ll kill me !” She spoke in English, but in her bewilderment did not question whether I understood.

I was just going to raise her when she sat up unaided. She limped over towards the car, fairly easily.

“Are you wounded, Madame ?”

“No. Knocked about all over. Everywhere !”

“But you’re bleeding ?”

“No. Get right away from here, at once ! Hide me !”

I stretched her out on the back seat, and started up. She sank down on to the carpet. The shadow engulfed her.

Fifty yards further on, a lurch : brakes on again. This time I had only just missed a man.

"Whatever you do, don't stop . . . I'll explain things . . . They've killed . . ."

But I got out, in a darkness that had suddenly turned hot. Whirr of cicadas ; glitter of stars ; no living thing but the gnats in the beam of the headlights. I went up to him. It was a Negro in a red dinner-jacket, with his legs in the ditch and his head on the edge of the roadway. His starched shirt-front was riddled with bullets. Still warm, and all-too flexible, he was like one of those stuffed dolls at a night-club. So violently had I been pitched into tragedy that my nerves did not for one instant disown me, and I calmly contemplated the harmonious moment, the pastoral crime.

Standing up in the car, the woman waited. Again she implored me to start off, and pointing to the scarlet form in the grass, she said :

"It's his own fault. He tried to rape me."

Half an hour later we reached my house, and without waiting for any assistance my companion jumped from the car with an ease that took me aback.

"Can I have a bath ? No, don't put on the light. I mustn't be seen like this."

I took her up to the first floor, more astonished than ever by this touch of coquetry. She stayed up there so long that I was wondering whether I oughtn't to go up, when at last she came down, wearing one of my dressing-gowns. She looked like a man, with the hard features of a mother-

superior, blue eyes lengthened by lines on the skin, and grey hair. Still very beautiful. She no longer had a trace of blood on her.

"It's gone as it came," she said without a smile, and poured out a drink for herself.

"I was coming back from the Casino . . . I'd won something . . . At the swing-door of the bar a nigger . . . one of the niggers from the band, came after me . . . He flung himself on me to rob me . . ."

"But you said to *rape* you at first."

"Yes, rape me as well . . . Some Americans were passing . . . They tried to protect me and they killed him . . ."

Her story was worthless, and I told her so.

"Your first words were to ask my protection : were you in fear of your life, then ?"

"Yes, of course . . . the other niggers."

"But why did these Americans, your saviours, abandon you on the road ?"

"I ran away while they were holding on to him."

"What reason had you for clearing out in that way ? Who gave you that thrashing ?"

She remained dumbfounded under this cross-examination.

"I think it will be best to go to the police," I said impatiently.

"Oh, anything but that ! It would make a frightful scandal ! You're a gentleman. You must hide me, do you understand ? You've nothing to be afraid of. I'm not guilty of anything."

She pulled herself together again.

"Anyway, how could I go out ? I've no dress now . . ."

Then without any transition :

"Are you a Frenchman ? Thank Heaven ! My name's Agatha Montclair. I'm from Charleston, South Carolina."

I was irritated by these manners of the Anglo-Saxon who can recover moral equilibrium in a bath. I stood up.

"I don't ask your name, Madame, but there's been damage done, and you're under my roof : I've a right to know."

At these words she stood stock still, like a hen immobilised at a chalk-mark.

"It's has been hell ! Absolute hell ! " she murmured.

The cognac dropped in the bottle, well below the label. My visitor sat on the edge of the table and began to talk, like a sleepwalker advancing.

"If you were American I think I'd die rather than tell the story . . . I really am in France, aren't I ? In a country that isn't my own ? This hot night, you know—those cicadas—and nothing but Yankees in these little old European houses . . . I simply don't know now . . . I imagine myself carried back home, in the Southern States. I get back my childhood again . . . Charleston . . ."

"I know your Charleston ! I can see it now : a carnival that's almost tropical, a dance-hall, a whole town wriggling with its feet turned in, and wooden rattles—what ? "

". . . I was born in a Greek temple of white painted wood, with olive-green shutters. I belong to an old family from North Carolina. My father was editor-in-chief of the *South Carolina Herald* . . ."

"Well, go on. What are you afraid of, then ? "

"I'm afraid of . . . a childhood memory. It's like

this : I see myself in the newspaper office on a night just like this, very warm, with scattered stars. I've been brought to see the announcement of the election results. Those elections of '88! In the South they were one of the episodes in the great political struggle between us Democrats and the Republicans who had robbed us, after the War of Secession, of fortune, power and prestige—to the profit of the Negroes. But that night, of course, I wasn't old enough to understand . . . My father had rigged up a wonderful screen in front of the office, and the results were thrown on it as the telegrams came in. And after all these years I can still see Citadel Square crammed with Blacks, clustering round the obelisk and even clambering on the statue of Calhoun in the middle. Beside my mother, I was leaning over the perforated wooden balcony, damp with the Southern warmth; I could distinguish those thousands of crinkled heads, attracted there by politics as flies by a carcass. For my own part, I was absorbed by the joy of watching the magic lantern. The first results arrived, and were satisfactory to everyone. But it soon became clear that our adversaries were going to sweep the board, for the crowd stopped eating their bananas and sucking their candy and larking about. There were shouts, and restlessness. You could see the Negroes against the yellow background of the citadel, rising like dough, you know, like the crust of one of your marvellous French *soufflés*, a chocolate one. All sorts were there: the agricultural peons in their blue cotton, workmen with the white oil-cloth peaks of their caps curving over their foreheads, dandies with orange shoes and the labels still visible on their new hats; a Negress below our balcony, with puffy cheeks and a red

straw hood hung with long veils, butted towards us with her haunches insultingly. Bottles were thrown; and the noise of breaking glass, which is a trumpet-call for rioting, turned them all crazy. The horses were taken out of the little street-trolleys, and every moment fresh demonstrators came to the rescue from the Jim Crow compartments at the rear, reserved for coloured people. My father made us go inside. The shutters were closed. Behind this flimsy wooden partition we could feel the presence of the mob—revolver-shots, howls! The square was flaming with all the bonfires of newspaper. I thought of the nigger kings in Christmas-present story-books, who cook the shipwrecked Whites. Some of the staff came running in: ‘Captain! These black bastards are talking of lynching us. The office will be stormed if we’re beaten!’ And then we were let out by a back door. The crowd was not so dense there, but here and there horrible creatures were carousing in the saloons; furtive protest meetings were going on in the barber-shops, and I can remember how the Blacks lay there in the chairs with white napkins round their chins like corpses. Everyone was talking politics. I heard them saying: ‘The country’s ours! We’ve *made* it! Where would the South be if it weren’t for us?’ Suddenly at a street-corner a huge Negro noticed us, and caught hold of me. I don’t believe he had any evil intention, but he was drunk and flinging his arms and legs about like their circus clowns, with that frenzied need of gesticulating their passions. He clasped me in his immense arms, showed his leopard’s teeth, and ran off with me. I was horribly afraid: my mother had told me that the niggers take away children for their sacrifices and tie them to stakes and suck the

arteries of their necks. But still I felt attracted by my ravisher ; I didn't struggle ; I felt overwhelmed, obliterated . . . But just then a Negress of the upper servant class fell on the sidewalk in a hysterical seizure ; attention was diverted from us ; they all crowded round her, and hurried away for help ; we were able to escape . . .”

“ Was your father murdered ? ”

“ No. When the news of the Republican victory came through, he had the presence of mind to show one last slide : ‘ *Telegrams interrupted. To be continued to-morrow.* ’ And when the lights went out on the office front, the mob gradually dispersed. Next day, exhausted by drink and excitement, they heard the election results and accepted them without any violence. But I've never forgotten that night—never ! I had such a shock, and a month or two afterwards I conceived such a phobia for Negroes, that soon my parents had to send me to school, on the doctor's advice, far away in Canada. I was brought up in Montreal, and it was there that I married and lived for over twenty years . . . Those years don't really matter to you. I was a perfectly ordinary woman. I paid calls, I gave dinner-parties. My husband made money in the lumber trade. The newspapers published my head, life-size, in their society supplements. I had no further occasion to see Blacks, and my childhood terrors never returned. Besides, my parents were dead, and I had no link with the South . . . Things lasted like that till 1917, till the war. My husband was appointed to organise hut construction, and went to France on that work. Canada means the country : there's nothing to keep a woman from growing old. I lived on with neither worries, nor jealousy nor envy—the only things to keep us

fit. The last of my best days were drifting away in boredom. What could I find to say to these rustics of last century and their parish clergy? Then one day, for lack of anything better to do, I had a radio set fitted up in my country drawing-room. I remember very clearly that winter evening, after tea, with the snow level with the windows . . . The village druggist, the agent for the radio firm, came to install the apparatus himself. I could hear nothing but shrieks, wailing, and sizzling. The optimistic tradesman encouraged me: 'That's only a storm: it'll be over in a moment. You couldn't have a better outfit.' Suddenly he turned the knob and got the proper wavelength, and there in my frozen solitude, from the depths of a hideous trumpet of ebonite, there suddenly came forth a grave, sweet song—'Go down, Moses!' It's the finest of the spirituals. Don't you know it? With the voices coming down with each phrase as if down steps—so deep, so bowed with suffering!

"It was Charleston coming through space to claim me, here in the snow! Charleston, with its memories of the buccaneers, its old tales of iron chests gnawed by sea-water on the white sands . . . (That's the beach where Poe staged his 'Gold Bug,' you know.) And suddenly I saw again its gulls and its crows, lights and shadows, the sea-front where my family took the evening air on a yacht, on the Ashley river, over to Fort Moultrie or Fort Sumter, those citadels that have looked out over the Atlantic with their mortars ever since the War of Independence. I yearned after our cotton-fields, for all their ugliness, always with the ruddy tinge of an invisible autumn, with the tiny white tip of the ripe cotton. This long-ago was rising to

the surface, bursting in a thousand bubbles . . . Go down, Moses. . . ! ”

“ Aren’t there any Negroes in Canada ? ”

My visitor gazed fixedly at me.

“ No, there aren’t . . . I had a coloured housemaid sent up from New York, a pitch-black face under her white cap and over her white apron. But she’d no friend to take her out in the evenings, and didn’t stay. I myself felt increasingly wretched. The longer I hung on in Canada, the more the words, the mere words, Carolina, Georgia, became exotic and fascinating to me. For me they did not stand only for the yellow-pink fields, for bunches of great trees shattered by tornadoes and shaggy with Spanish moss ; they did not only call up the Negro women at work, in their ragbag clothes, or sitting in front of their grey wooden hives with green shutters, pipes between their teeth, long thin legs ending in men’s shoes, never laced up . . . No, they were a last call of my youth, a craving for freedom, for a softer air. The Blacks say that the sun sings—don’t you think they’re right ?

“ One day I decided to go off to Charleston, and I arrived there after a very long journey. The luxury trains for gay Florida and the Palm Beach of the stock-gamblers scorn this dead province, and give it a wide berth now. But was *this* the goal of my desires, the places that had left me with all these living memories ? In front of the station some antique automobiles were dozing. (You wonder what happens to very old cars in the end ? They go and die at Charleston.) I got to know that austere city as it is, as no doubt it always has been, with its ill-paved streets, its crenelated citadel and gloomy magazine, places that speak of

nothing but old-time wars. I understood better the rigidity of our Southern Protestantism, which had moulded my people, a hundred times more rigid than the piety of the North. My birthplace was still there, looking just like the other dwellings, with their air of haunted houses ; it stood leaning over a street with a Dutch name running down towards the sea, and I found once more our English wistaria, and our cushioned lawn, its turf imported from Kent and rolled by Negro gardeners, the garden of camellias and azaleas—and all in a throng of church-spires ! The churches ! Every persuasion—Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodist-Episcopalians . . . The oldest of them was built centuries ago by your French Huguenots.

“The Negroes were confined in inaccessible quarters, as far removed from the Whites as matter from spirit in books of devotion. In the centre of the city no trace of them remained except the old slave-market . . . So you see, when I say Charleston, there’s no need to hum a tune . . .

“I returned to Canada disillusioned and startled. The cold, they say, freezes, the feelings and inspires restraint ; but I almost enjoyed it. There is security in the unsociable North.

“In 1920 I joined my husband in New York. We lived there for two years. I felt lost in that foreign city which is no longer American and speaks every language under the sun. You don’t find five million beings flung together pell-mell without their picking up some strange habits. And I saw the Broadway vaudevilles invaded by coloured artists. Negroes ! Everybody swore by them ! The war seemed to have brought them sprouting from the

ground in such numbers that certain quarters had become smaller versions of Charleston. When they left the South and came northward, they did not remain peasants: they had been changed into workmen. Their skin had turned steely grey. I had no hatred for their race, but these new contacts made me feel better how much the individual among them horrified me. The mere idea of their smell, the shape of their mouths, revolted me. I could not look without a shudder at those French papers where you saw white nurses tending black wounded. I was alive to the poetic tragedy of these exiles, but as soon as a Negro came near me, I wanted to see him dead. I loathed them for being so prolific. Those millions of dark skins were not mere statistics for me; they were so many vile and hideous matings—out of sight. If someone suggested their castration as the only solution of the problem, I inwardly applauded. A friend who claimed to be free from prejudices, once declared in my presence that the hatred of the Whites for the Blacks is simply a jealousy of males. I cannot describe how insufferable I thought that.

“My husband had acquired the tastes of the moment. We went out every night, and went to bed later and later; we went to places where you’re given more and more drink, and craved for company who could get excited, shout, laugh louder and louder . . . So of course we discovered Harlem, with its obscene songs and its shamelessness, the tints of dawn—all that sort of thing, you know. I can still see myself driving up Lennox Avenue after the theatre. Shades from an inferno emerging from the dark, and instantly falling back into it; faces that did not warn you of the approach of the bodies they preceded—the whole thing

falling on you all at once. Stiff collars gleaming alone, as if suspended in the darkness. We were entering the largest black city in the world . . . The 'Cocoanut Grove,' the 'Sugar Cane'—we visited all those underground cabarets one after the other. Straw on the floor to make it look like a stable, orchestras with giant trombones . . . nickel . . . locomotives behind the gates of a grade-crossing . . . Silver flasks stuck out from hip pockets. Everything was dancing, as in some house with a poltergeist; the Negro waiters dressed as planters, kept shuffling their feet while they served the bottles of White Rock, the mineral water. . . .

" 'You're going to see Florence Bit,' I was told.

" She came on in her skirt made out of sacking, with a red check pattern, her hair tightly plastered down, in three wide strips with a blue sheen. She sank on to a rustic chair, hands behind her back, vile—and magnificent. In a chanting voice she began to sing blues. Beneath the absurd Wesleyan harmony, it was our land of the South that seemed to be uttering its plaint, just as under the daubs of some bad period, in Italy, you find the fresh painting of the primitives . . . Her green body twisted . . . It was like the electric chair and its currents . . . She squinted; she wiped her nose with her foot; she was insulting, to get a laugh . . . She changed her colour, and her skin came white in large patches. They called her the Panther. . . .

" The Negroes gave stamps on the floor that were like explosions. They had hastened here from every direction—uprooted peasants, intellectuals who had lost caste, hold-up men, policemen. Their eyes closed with happiness, they danced with their palms flat on the hips of their women. Florence Bit circled round by herself, a bunch of dollar

bills in her hand, begging. When the band stopped, she came up to bow her greetings, and the kisses she flung to the public came, not from her lips, but from her stomach—as if it were her stomach, gorged at last, which was thanking them . . . Not long afterwards I discovered that my husband was keeping her. To have a coloured mistress gave you a certain standing, amongst his business friends. She betrayed him with her Negro elevator-boys, and gave them our money.

“I was then plunged right into our epoch, wherein nobody grows old. I took my pleasure where I could find it. But so far as that goes, the round of America is soon done. And then your Paris rises on the horizon, as it always does, once at least in a woman’s life, like a sin. Paris is like a drug: the first year you stop at an hotel for a week; the second, you take a furnished room for three months; the third you rent an apartment; and in the end you buy a house and never go back to your own country again. That was nineteen-twenty to nineteen—I can’t remember exactly. In Paris the years just run together like different kinds of people, Paris is the real melting-pot . . .”

“People are blended together much more by joint pleasure than by joint work.”

“Sure! With your people, everything seems to be possible. One doesn’t believe in the sexes any more. Why still in different races? What surprised me most was being surprised at nothing. But there was one thing that stupefied me, and that was to meet Frenchwomen, women like ourselves, who actually dared to show themselves in the street with men of colour. In the Quartier Latin it had already struck me as very queer to see those Chinese students

with their white mistresses. And just think—one day, right in town, at the Tuileries, I saw a great Negro chauffeur, very black, with huge limbs, lips jutting out further than his peaked cap, bloodshot eyes, waiting for a mannequin coming out of the Rue de la Paix. He greeted her so gently and calmly and self-confidently that I was taken aback. He must have been four times her weight . . . She pressed up against him, pale and fair, in adoration. I looked round; nobody turned to look. That love was being fulfilled, was running its course, like any other.”

“If nature makes these unions fruitful, she must approve them. . . .”

“But laws exist to prevent many things permitted by nature. That huge nigger and that blonde child. . . I thought it was a mere chance, a freak of Paris; but since then, in provincial towns, even in the country, I have never seen any difference made amongst you between a white man and a black. Never have I seen a Black served last, or elbowed off the pavement, or kept in specified quarters . . . Women can talk to them, and yield to them . . .”

“Why not?”

“Can you ask? Look here—if I were to find a trace of black blood in my body, I could never survive it! If I had a coloured child, I should strangle it! And yet I’m attracted by Negroes.”

“The Negro and the woman are both creatures of passion, both instinctive . . .”

“Love of music and pomp and religious ecstasies, of fake jewellery and pure blood . . .”

“That’s why they both triumph at the same period.”

“What I like in them is the same thing that shocked me

so much that evening at the Tuileries—their strength . . . those long simian arms, the grease of their skin that will stain linen, that broad wooden hand that comes down masterful on a silk dress—on a frail body. In America I should never have thought such things possible, or rather I'd have pushed back the thought as it rose. But in Paris . . . one's always dragged back there, to the wind of freedom blowing so hard in your face that when you arrive you're almost knocked backwards by it. After that a French demon kept whispering in my ear: 'Why not?'—exactly as you did a moment ago. It's not by daylight that Negroes conquer—it's at night, by virtue of the dark, by the weapons of music, by the 'batteries,' by the flesh . . . I could not keep myself from dreaming of how Blacks, in that great civilised city where I was living, at that very moment, with the sanction of the laws, were taking white women, crushing them, binding them to themselves as to stakes . . . I had always heard of their great virility . . . I should have liked to see . . . It was a spectacle my eyes yearned for. I felt that if only I could have seen, I should no longer be so uncomfortable. I knew nobody in Paris. I had no friends in that foreign society which, it appears, goes to low haunts as if to the theatre . . ."

The night was beginning to turn greenish ; at last there was a breath of wind.

My visitor quickened her story :

"Then I thought it would be better for me if I left Paris. Early in the summer I came to the rooms I had reserved at Valescure, and a few days after my arrival I went out for a stroll in the Estérel. It was evening, and after a pretty hot

day I was trying to get some air. The hotel porter had told me of a picturesque old fortress at Fréjus, where the French had taken refuge at the landing of the Saracens. (This was a long time ago, you know—Napoleon's time, was it?) At a turning on the road I caught sight of a camp. The tents were already lit up with candles, like huge lanterns, and behind the hedge you could hear the noise of empty cans, and falling rifles. Suddenly a vivid red object—a sentry. He had a comical little hat on his head, like a Turk. In front of me I had his teeth and his bayonet . . . He struck me as much more handsome, and much blacker, than ours at home."

"A Senegalese rifleman . . . an ancestor of your Negroes . . ."

"I daresay. He didn't look like a private soldier. He had the air of a chief who has reconquered the country—as if the Moors had come back. He let me peep through the barbed wire. Near the piled rifles some Negroes were washing, stripped to the waist. Some of them were coughing, and in spite of the heat seemed to be very cold. Others were on their knees, bowed down towards the setting sun and singing: 'Allah! Allah!' There was one, very handsome and very mischievous, who was just dressing; his comrades handed him a long, broad, scarlet sash, and pivoting quickly on his heels, he wound it round his body; it was as lovely as the Russian Ballet; on the back of his hand he had a silver coin, fastened by diagonal silver chains, like Oriental women in the theatre. I thought he was coming out . . . but no."

"You were sorry? You wanted to talk to him?"

"Yes, I felt drawn to him. He was exactly like the one who had held me in his arms when I was a child, that

election night in Charleston. As if in mortal danger, I lived all that night again in one second: the dress I wore, my mother's shriek, the desire I felt to be tied to a stake . . . I asked the sentry for leave to visit the camp. 'You no go in,' he said. 'No good fo' ladies. Savages in there!'"

I interrupted her:

"Why do you tell me all this stuff? How long ago was this visit to Fréjus?"

The woman, hitherto quite calm, stared at me panic-stricken, as she did on the road.

"Yesterday . . . Last night, in fact. Since then I simply couldn't tell what has happened! I was a victim of—a cyclone blew right through me . . . Blacks! 'They're the devil! Every move I've made—you'd think someone else had made them all for me . . . First of all, I went back to my hotel. Immediately after dinner, in evening dress, I went down to prowling round the camp. The sentry was still there. I was frightened. I was driven back to the Casino at Juan-les-Pins. I played for a while . . . I had supper with some Americans I didn't know. We emptied cases of champagne. There was an American jazz-band—coloured. The saxophone was a handsome tall fellow: he had that scornful look which they haven't got at home but they get immediately in France."

"Once they've had white women."

"He wore a red dinner-jacket . . . the same red as the sash of that soldier at Fréjus. There was a broad black ribbon round his neck to support his instrument. When the band stopped he played a solo with a marvellous kind of insolence:

Charleston, made in Carolina, Charleston!

All evening he played . . . he was playing for me. He danced, he sang, he showed off. The Frenchmen stamped and encouraged him; the Americans were furious. At one moment I needed air, and I went out . . . alone on to the main road. He followed me . . . No doubt he had seen that I was spending lots of money . . .”

“KU KLUX KLAN IN FRANCE!”

announced the French press. The word “sensational” came into it. “The Americans were going too far!” “Foreigners and outsiders will kindly settle their quarrels elsewhere!” “The country is no longer our own.” The newspapers of the Left appealed to racial equality; the League of the Rights of Man were up in arms. The Côte d’Azur papers had failed to hush up the story: a Negro had been summarily executed near Antibes. An American Negro from a jazz-band at Juan-les-Pins, found at dawn with eighty-six bullets in his body; besides that, a heavy automobile had backed over his face. There was a piece of paper on the corpse:

Respect for White Women!

K. K. K.

It was a purely American tragedy, acted inside provincial France. Should the culprits be sought amongst the nude young bathers, with the little white caps of the American Navy, lazily dozing like crocodiles along the beaches? Or among these grizzled bankers from Wall Street, cool in their Palm Beach suits, now peaceably sipping their orange-

CHARLESTON

ade at the Casino ? The bandsmen knew nothing, except that the saxophonist had abruptly left the supper-room that evening. There poured from their mauve lips a language which the official interpreter at the court in Nice pretended to understand, but which threw no light on the inquiry. Meanwhile certain "influences," emanating from the hotel interests, were intervening with the officials concerned.

The business was shelved.

A new player arrived from the Rue Fontaine.

EXCELSIOR

The zebra cannot lay down his stripes.

Dahomey Proverb.

THE town of Excelsior, Georgia, sprouts modestly round a junction of roads ; one, going from north to south, joins Carolina with Florida, and the other, the more frequented, runs from Macon to Savannah and the sea. The Negro quarter, " Little Africa," as it is called, begins at the eighth block. And there, in a little house of businesslike brick, shut in by a Spanish rough-cast wall with sunflowers looking over its top like sentries, there lives a white family. A stranger, at least, would take them for such, though everybody in Excelsior knows that the Blooms are black. The town register shows the letter " C " after the name of Victor Bloom—" coloured," as opposed to the " W " to which the Whites are entitled. They themselves talk of being a " Creole family," as the native Negroes of New Orleans do in their anxiety to be as close as possible to the Whites, and the family consists of the father, Mr. Victor Bloom, an important undertaker and embalmer, the old mother, an aunt, and two young sisters, Alma and Poolie, and lastly, a son of about thirty, Octavius Bloom. Octavius is the pride of his family. He has the officious quick-wittedness often observed in the half-breed, is an excellent dancer, speaks fluent American—not at all the richly exotic " gumbo " patois of his parents—and is the admiration of



all the women of Excelsior. He is essentially a type of those *improvisatori*, authentic characters in a Negro *commedia dell' arte*, who are known here as "crocodries." He served in France in 1918. He is a partner in a real-estate agency, and owns a Buick. Note, as a portent of emancipation, that at the age of ten he was already parting his hair. And to-day he is even wearing the small Douglas Fairbanks moustache of the conqueror.

It is Sunday, after lunch. The garage of the funeral establishment is closed. Behind its doors wait the hearses, draped, black, silvered, incrusting with mirrors, and the ostrich-plumed automobiles for opulent burials. The office likewise is closed. Closed also is the showroom of coffins, first- and second-class, with their nickel-handled "caskets" ranging upwards from imitation painted mahogany and including velvet covering, white satin padding, or polished steel casing. Some of the sarcophagi are adorned with filigree gold initials; others are provided with miniature rustic fencing, surmounted by the symbolic words, "*The Heavenly Gates*"; and the most expensive contain a musical-box which, when the coffin is opened, starts off playing, "Go down, Death!" Behind this lie the embalming chambers, for the moment empty of customers, and the pharmacy with its bottles of chemicals, asphalts, medicinal herbs.

Mr. Victor Bloom, his shirt-sleeves held up by elastic bands, and with a green eye-shade on his forehead, is drinking his coffee. His temples have that bold dash of purple which can be seen in Rubens's studies of Negroes. The aunt is on sentry duty, seated on the wooden staircase at the front-door of the house; she is holding the door

half-open, in the traditional Creole way, with the blind drawn back over herself like a garment. In a neighbouring room one catches a glimpse of old mother Bloom's siesta. Her bed is enclosed in a cage, as she is given to sleep-walking. She lies utterly limp, a cotton handkerchief round her head, her cigar laid on the corner of the bedside table, and snoring. The women are talking quietly in the drawing-room, a place of lavish ugliness, devoured by damp, with warped models of urns and pious pictures crowding its walls. Nobody ever plays the mechanical piano. The dominating article of furniture is the side-board, with blue paper poppies stuck in shell-cases.

Octavius Bloom is sighted at the end of the street. Excitement and bustle; the flies become intolerable; a pair of scissors falls down. Enter the young man, his hat tilted over one ear, his smart suit the colour of tulip-wood.

"Hello! Come back on foot?"

"A dam' cracker that I don't know ran into me at the corner of Goethe Street just now. Drunk as a lord. He started to apologise. But the barber pointed to me and shouted: 'Don't worry, mister. He's a nigger.' And then not content with messing up my bus, he wanted me to get out into the bargain; claimed I was going too fast for a nigger. Of course there was a regular rain of 'dirty stinking nigger,' 'black bastard,' and all the rest of it. I tried to explain that the fellow was drunk, but the crowd wouldn't listen, you may be sure. It turned ugly. The cops just melted out of sight, and I saw I was running into a lynching . . ."

"No Black can take a chance . . ." said Mr. Bloom senior, with bitterness.

"Not one," added Poolie, as on the edge of a grave.
 "What a handicap!"

"No liberty for us. And no justice."

"None. And yet up in New York the Statue of Liberty is black."

"Only time they ever let me go in the front row," said Octavius, "was over in No Man's Land."

Alma sighed.

"It wasn't worth it," she said, "having all that success at Mardi-Gras as King of the Zulus! Once the carnival's over and the money's spent and the people have had their laugh, we're just so much dirt . . ."

"Yes," answered the aunt, "but don't forget that for twenty-four hours Octavius was absolutely king of Excelsior."

And the old question was taken up once again, as it was after every affront, turned over and over for years, in all its aspects, in the private councils of the family. Should they cross the "line," the famous "line" separating the two races? Why not? Had not chance made the Bloom children almost all white? To enter the other camp at last! To venture into the heart of the forbidden country, to slough off the past, the old skin . . .! To become white! Outside America, outside the Southern States, outside Excelsior even, nobody would have thought of regarding the Blooms as Blacks . . . Then why this endless postponing? They ought to brace themselves, to be bold, to escape from here. But the old subjection that chained the slave to his plantation still lies heavy on their shoulders.

"Where could we go?"

"New York."

But in New York you couldn't yet be quite sure of yourself . . . there is Harlem . . . for although there are intelligent Blacks who are proud to see one of their race cross the line, and others, gifted with a sense of humour, who are delighted at the notion of fooling the Whites, the majority show themselves jealous and furious. Or again, even when the game seems to be won, you may fall under the eye of some old Southerner who spots the bluish tinge of your cornea, or the mauve of your nails, and sounds the alarm. Then it would be isolation once more, and the black ghetto. . . .

But what emboldened Mr. Victor Bloom was the sight of his offspring : Octavius was a real American, with broad shoulders and fair hair. He never said "yaas," but always "yeh" or "yep ;" he knew better than anyone how to stick his chewing-gum under the chair so as to get it again after the meal ; and he played on the baseball team of the Georgia Giants. And as a finishing-touch of poise, he took pains to work the verb "to check" into every sentence he uttered. One-sixteenth of African blood, at the most . . . His sister Alma was handsome, with unobtrusive eyes, and a nose no longer flat but rounded. Well brought-up, very much the young lady, she had hardly a trace of that greenish tinge when she woke up (like the little Negro babies when they are born), but so well-made-up . . . And Poolie was perfectly fair, with an almost aquiline nose. And so cultured ! Honours prize at Straight College, New Orleans !

"Aren't folks silly with their talk about crinkly hair ! It's just the heat that makes it curl up like that !"

"Anyway, what is there to boast about in straight hair?"

"And those thin, brittle joints, and the long hands they reproach us with—aren't they just signs of breeding?"

The aunt was along in voicing pessimism:

"Oh, dear, oh dear! We're coloured, and our family name's Jewish, and we're Catholic in religion—how can you hope to escape the Klan with all that?"

But Mr. Victor Bloom went on, in that slow heavy way the Blacks have of grinding their ideas in the mill.

"No, damn chance for a Black down here . . . Listen, boy. There are others who've done it before you. The thing goes on every day, it seems, up North and out West . . . It's a question of climate; the further North you go, the whiter will be the children you have. Just look: what happens to the two hundred thousand coloured Americans who've disappeared with each census, eh? Have they been taking a little trip to Africa? Not on your life!"

"The essential thing," Octavius remarked, "is to get a good start, and not to miss your shot . . ."

"You can count on our silence and our help. There'll be five hundred dollars a month in the bank for you for a year," answered his father. "Go ahead! Study your ground. And once the thing's done, take your sisters along. We old folk have got our skins too well smoked to risk coming after you."

From the depths of her bed, old Mother Bloom had heard it all. The yellow wax face rose up in its cage; the turban of mauve check had slipped down and showed the short fuzzy hair.

"Octavius will do very well to strike out on his own," she said in perfect French, with the pretty, broken voice of an old Creole woman. "How often did Monsieur Périer, my dear father, advise me to stay in New Orleans, and not to come and bury myself in Georgia! He used to say that these provincial towns were just shrimp-pools! Exactly, shrimp-pools!"

September. Cornelius Creek. A small seaside-place in Delaware. Ocean prospect. None of the dreadful bathing-beaches of Newport or Atlantic City, with the sand hidden by supine bodies laid out side-by-side, as in hunting pictures, and the sea salted with sweat and cumbered with rafts and balloons and canoes, with not an inch to take a header. The Cornelius Hotel had its soundly respectable company, official families from Washington and from big business, Kentucky stock-breeders, Virginia judges. As the posters of land for sale said: "*High Class . . . Quiet . . . A seaside resort for the aristocracy . . .*"

Octavius Bloom had been living here for two months. His popularity could be accounted for by his vitality, his motor-boat, the quality of the drink he made in his pantry, his cocktail-parties, his bridge-evenings for the elderly ladies, and his fine voice. The young men imitated his double-breasted, brass-buttoned waistcoats, of a deep blue borrowed from Paul Whiteman's Band. Jewish families from Broadway, emboldened by his name, made advances to him, and every day young girls offered themselves in marriage. Between whiles, Octavius was busied with lots adjoining the shore and sales of real estate.

By the end of a year he was a personage at the resort, the dandy, the "big man" of Cornelius Creek. He made plenty of money. He had sent for his sisters and aunt from Excelsior, and together they occupied a villa amongst the pines. Alma and Poolie were now introduced to the joys of flirtation, bright colours, and fermented drinks, and very soon they forgot their shy arrival in imitation leopardskin cloaks, their ugly red velvet hats with gold roses, and their pink cotton stockings. They were white, infinitely white, and very much perfumed—although Octavius preferred the more natural tan of the sea. Poolie let herself go, with the most comical byplay, the most diverting remarks.

"What a fine minstrel your sister would have made!" people remarked to Octavius, dazzled by her improvised songs, the shower of her amusing sayings, the bubbling of her fancy. "A good mixer!"

Their old aunt prayed God it might all last.

"All's well!" Poolie now wrote to her old folk. "No more Excelsior, no more outrages! Good-bye to the Jim Crow trains and street-cars! The old formulas are finished for us, dear papa—'coloured people should keep their place,' or 'keep their station,' and all the rest of that nonsense . . . We travel in Pullman cars, and the Negro porter carries our baggage . . ."

The status of the Blooms was definitely consecrated by a tea-party with Judge and Mrs. MacLean, of MacLean Lodge, a family of old origins who from Forest Hill overlooked the resort, its morality and its beach. These

austere retired people were the leaders in the small provincial colony which lived all the year round at Cornelius Creek. Mrs. MacLean had once known some Blooms in Boston, formerly judges of the Supreme Court, and asked if the newcomers were relatives. Octavius hinted at a junior branch. He had just bought a piece of land on the heights, on very favourable terms, and was now planning to build. In a quite non-committal conversation with the Judge, he even envisaged the possibility of getting together funds for a casino on the European model and a Country Club. The MacLeans' son, a student at Harvard, was always in Poolie's company. Admittedly, she was becoming beautiful. Her sister Alma was more skilful at capturing elderly gentlemen with the machine-gun fire of her glances; but Poolie was victorious with all the young men. The Africans have fetish-days, on which the face is painted in various hues; but for the Misses Bloom at Cornelius Creek, every day was a fetish-day, and found them richly farded. Their bodies now had no trace of a roll; their reddish-brown hair was unfrizzed, though still a little too stiff, like thatch; in dancing the black-bottom they were unrivalled. Pleasure flushed their cheeks with hitherto unknown tinges. They wore bathing-suits in lively colours, and had abandoned for ever those blue glass beads which, from the Phoenicians even unto Woolworth's, have always been manufactured for the benefit of negresses. Open-air photographers had no other subject but the Bloom girls. Their grace as they lay floating in the water made of every wave a hammock.

One morning when Octavius lay basking on the sand with his two sisters, his limbs spread out in the sun like an espalier, he began to contemplate Poolie. He was very proud of her, proud of that dazzling complexion.

"I never noticed you had a birthmark like that on the nape of your neck," he said, observant as a debutante's mother.

Poolie shrugged her shoulders, perfectly sure of herself.

"You'll go a long way before you find a skin like mine," she answered.

That must have been the opinion of young MacLean, who came to meet her for the bathe as usual. There were whispers abroad up and down the beach, and they weren't those of waves in the shells . . . There was talk of an engagement . . .

A few days later Octavius was again astounded . . . There could be no doubt about it: the mark which he had noticed on Poolie's skin was still there, and it even seemed to be spreading over her neck and encroaching on the lower part of her face. It was a large stain of very soft bistre, melting into the white of the rest of her skin, and toning down into it.

He took Alma aside and confided his anxiety to her.

"But Poolie is simply taking on tan," she answered.

"The sun doesn't burn you in October."

"Poolie wants to be in the fashion. I know she's doing without almond cream."

Octavius was reassured, and thought no more of it. But dining with the MacLeans one evening early in November, he had a real shock. In the strong glare from the tablecloth and the glitter of a *lamé* gown, he felt absolutely

certain that Poolie's face was turning brown. It was like a slight eclipse, pale mauve on the cheeks, a chamois tint on the temples and the nape, rising from the neck and now reaching her face. Still more curious was it that the features themselves seemed to be altering. The nose was losing its sharpness and solidity ; the mouth was beginning to jut forward ; an indefinably exotic air, which certainly heightened her brilliance, was transforming Poolie. During dinner he could not take his eyes off his sister's face. She noticed it, and blushed very red.

" Damnation ! "

They had got back from the MacLean's. Octavius had been round in his car to the garage. He had rejoined his sisters in the drawing-room.

Between these two women weeping in their evening dresses, Octavius in his dress-suit was pacing up and down the room. Brutally he struck the table with his fist.

" Damnation ! "

Only sobbing could be heard.

" There's no way out of it, my dear," he said, softening a little. " You'll have to go away ! If you don't go back to Excelsior, it's all up. A year's effort wasted ! Your sister's future ruined, and I myself . . . my good name will be done for ! "

" You seem to have got that fixed in your head, Octavius . . . And I tell you it's simply my bleach cream disappearing . . . because of dancing . . . "

" It's not true ! You haven't been dancing to-night ! You know what the truth is, and Alma knows it, and I

know it, and it won't be long before everybody knows it. *You're going back!* Skin's a thing that is born and dies. It's no fault of yours . . . Nobody can be sure of his skin!"

Poolie collapsed. And sure enough they could see her back in the lamplight, with its vertebral column already browner, the shoulders a warm half-tint, still faint and pale in colour; round the neck her skin was going speckled, like porcelain, and reminding one of the variegation of certain petals; and as for the face, it was turning a ruddy beige.

"I don't want to go and live at Excelsior! Anyway I'm engaged!"

"That won't be for long!"

"I was quite right—I always said it: we are being punished for our pride!" sighed the aunt.

"Suppose we hired a very black girl to serve at table and show up how white we are?" said Alma.

"I don't want to leave Bobbie!" wailed Poolie.

"And have us stoned, and tarred and feathered? And have the house set on fire? Is that what you want? And have the old people die of shame, back home?"

"B-B-Bobbie!"

The aunt intervened:

"I've heard about a medicine-man . . ."

"That'll make things worse," retorted Octavius fiercely. "Poolie is going to turn chestnut-brown, and from that she'll go sooty. I tell you I've seen this before, in the Lafon Asylum at New Orleans . . . A piebald negress . . . Meanwhile, Poolie will do me the kindness not to go out again. Her meals will be brought to her room when people are here."

"And dances?"

"You've got the radio . . ."

"And . . ."

"That's enough!"

"Oh, if only we hadn't been so crazy as to leave home when the moon was waning!" sighed the aunt, "this sorrow would never have befallen us!"

A bridge-tea at the MacLeans'.

The disappearance of Poolie is the sole topic these days.

"Her brother is keeping her shut up . . . It's a question of an inheritance . . ."

"Totally disfigured . . . leprosy . . .!"

"They say she's gone mad . . . He's looking for a nurse."

"In any case, Bobbie's gone back to Harvard," said Mrs. MacLean severely. "He gave me his formal promise not to write to her, and to put her out of his mind."

Truth is an epidemic fever. By Christmas-time the whole of Cornelius Creek knew. At first the word went round that the Blooms were "Wops," undesirables, communists. Then definitely that they were niggers, damned niggers who had elbowed their way into the best society! After all—to mistake Cornelius Creek for a slave-village, and the MacLeans' exclusive home for a plantation . . . it was too much! Parents who couldn't even sign their name, no doubt! And that trash had an automobile! Why not a mule? And Catholics into the bargain!

The attack of the Nordic race against the Bloom villa was opening, furious but methodical.

"There's nothing for it now but to pack up," wailed the aunt. She was terrorised, remembering the South and its lynching-trees.

Alma would have been quite glad just to return to Excelsior, to her little room overlooking the shed for the hearses. She missed Georgia, with its pure, almost African, sky, the pillars of the porches, the stoves draped with crepe, the palm-trees. Poolie remembered those happy years at Straight College, and the good Sisters there, her successes, the smell of sulphur in the practical science class ; and she seemed still to hear the uproar of the boys playing baseball in the yard, the dull thud of the ball against gloved hands . . . There could no longer be any doubt for anyone : she had gone back to a real mulatto. What strange caprice had her body had in this regression ? Through what jumbled combination had her brother and sister remained white ? Mysterious alchemy of blood. Must it be held responsible for the mingling of races, and, behind race, for the passions which had bred this alloy, set up this obscure working in the crypts of the skin ?

The Blooms were struck off the Golf Club ; they were advised not to enter the Cornelius Hotel. At church the minister preached a sermon in which he laid it down that the white angels could not join with the black angels at the Last Judgment.

Octavius clenched his teeth.

One by one, under various pretexts, the shops refused to deliver to the villa. Hardly a morning passed without

bringing an anonymous injunction to clear out of the district.

"If things are like that," said Octavius, "not only shall I not go, but I'll send for the old people."

And he wired to Excelsior, to Mr. Victor Bloom, who at that moment was actually selling up his property . . . He inserted advertisements to procure a coloured staff for himself. He made a point of appearing in public, and when a restaurant declined to serve him, he protested before the courts under the Civil Rights Acts. This attitude was regarded by the Caucasians as an insult. Bricks and Brownings were used against the windows of the villa. The Blooms sat tight. They drove into Baltimore in the early morning, and brought back provisions. One day they got back to find their house sacked. After that they did not go out again, made their own ice, and lived on the products of their own backyard. They kept quite still behind their lowered blinds, but they did not yield. They were saved only because Cornelius Creek has no working-class sections, and the fury of a mob need not be feared. Judge MacLean and his friends, old men, contented themselves with fist-shaking from a distance. This went on all winter.

With the spring land prices fell. As always happens when coloured people manage to install themselves near Whites and refuse to quit, the Blooms made an empty space all round themselves.

Early in the summer it was made known that MacLean Lodge was to let; the Judge and his wife were evacuating the territory. The news spread confusion in the enemy camp.

In the autumn the whole of Forest Hill was for sale.

Octavius was able to buy the neighbouring properties at low prices. He went to New York, saw some people, made an able exposition of his project for the creation of a summer resort exclusively for Blacks, close to the great centres, with attractions, circus, golf, and a warm sea-water swimming-pool. The new rich of Harlem, the small business-men of the Black Belt of Chicago, who, since Prohibition, have had a taste for investing their savings in land speculation, were all attracted. The *Crisis*, the chief organ of the coloured press, viewed the enterprise with favour, and gave it editorial encouragement. . . .

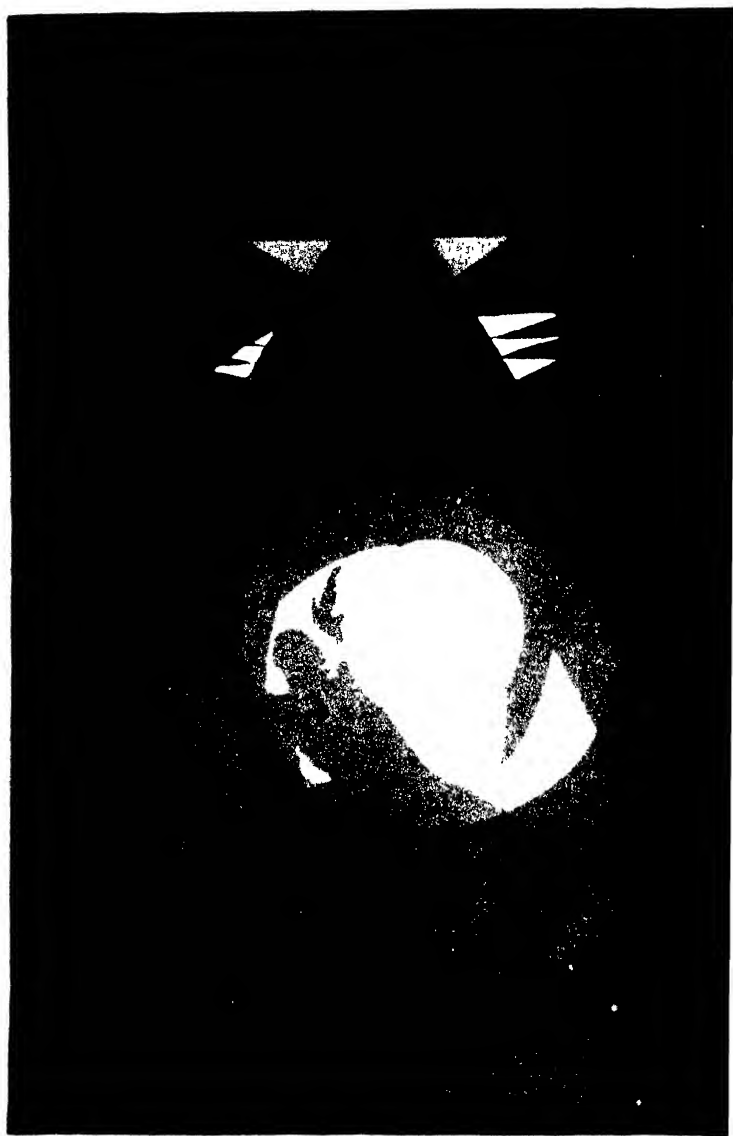
And now Octavius Bloom is a boss. He smokes Texas cigars from morn to night. He has bought MacLean Lodge. He is continually talking of "us Blacks . . ." He is worth two million dollars. Poolie is married to a lawyer in New Orleans.

None of them has any idea of how these un hoped-for triumphs were really brought to pass : namely, that their aunt sewed some little mascot dolls into the linings of their clothes. Old Mrs. Bloom is still alive, a dappled Negress whom the Northern civilisation leaves quite unamazed. They can hear her singing old Creole songs in her bed in the mornings : among them, "Ah, Tincoutou !" It is the plaint of a mulatto girl who would like to become white, but cannot find the proper soap.

SYRACUSE, OR THE PANTHER-MAN

THE orange taxi stopped at the corner of Jackson Avenue and Twenty-second Street, and there got out a man of about fifty, the colour of roasted coffee. He wore a black frock-coat; his hat was of black felt (Clothmerchants' Guild style); and he was wreathed in simple and authoritative gestures. He took advantage of his stance on the pavement to contemplate the building opposite, a pink, zoned skyscraper, picked out with gold in a style that announced its newness, and honeycombed with windows in which stenographers could be seen on every one of the nineteen floors. All these stenographers were black. And a closer examination of the honeycomb showed that the whole building was occupied by Blacks.

Doctor Lincoln Vamp glowed with pride. He had willed this, he had created it: a house reserved for his race and all the activities of his race—one to each story. A methodical formula, and absolutely modern. The age of anarchy, dirt, disorder, was dead. Hygiene, morality, Ripolin, nickel-plating. His brethren, hitherto scattered haphazard over the horizontal immensity of the Southern States, had here been accumulated, by his labours, vertically. And crossing the avenue, he entered the House of the New Negro. Galleries of yellow marble, bronze elevators, pneumatic tubes, rubber carpetings. The Doctor was greeted by everybody he met as he went through; in his honour they hoisted white pennants on their teeth and in the



corners of their eyes. He was one of those modern leaders who no longer mean to be styled "boss" or "uncle" or "colonel:" he expected "Doctor." He was prodigal with his handshakes, like a Portugese *cacique*, of which he reminded one in other ways. His grip had the political man's touch. And indeed, the Doctor was a power in the Democratic party: he supported prohibition, the anti-tobacco crusade, the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and racial equality; he handled electoral funds and had a share in the direction of the local Black daily, the *Syracuse Projector*. A political man—not a politician: he was not one of those ephemeral prophets or mystical conjurers who sometimes infatuate the negroes.

He addressed the young slave in the elevator:

"Page the reception-clerks on all storeys and say I'm here. Meeting's in the Marie-Antoinette room."

Up from the basement came the druggist-photographers, and from the sub-basement, the barbers. The Northern Negro Savings Bank (Syracuse Branch), which had lent its executive committee room for the occasion, occupied the first floor; from the second came down the employees of the insurance company, the Negro Beehive; from the third, the partners in the co-operative foodstuffs concern, the Afro-American Stores, etc. . . . The nineteen storeys represented every piece of machinery in the human factory. Doctor Vamp had grouped their choicest elements into an association of mutual assistance, over which he himself presided with the title of Grand Esteemed Steward of the Most Exalted Order of the Knights of Samson. Auxiliary

branches, known as Temples, themselves divided into Lodges, had been planted out over the whole region as far as Buffalo.

The great executive was surrounded by a hundred dark faces with white enamel eyes : colorados, claros, colorado-claros, etc. . . . Through all the dilution of blood, in spite of adulterated unions and inextricable adventures, they still bore a few scattered traces of their origin : the open look of the people of the plain, sociable and merry, or the defiant expression of those whose ancestors had lived in hiding amid the green tunnels of the jungle.

The Doctor removed his hat, scratched the grey astrakhan of his pate, and pulling at his short beard, began to speak :

“ On the eve of my departure for Europe, to attend the Pan-African Congress at Brussels, I propose to summarise our position for you—our local position, I mean. I am no man of words, I am a realist. Facts : these are the only nourishment worthy of an animal endowed with reason, as Dickens has written. When I took control of the situation a good many years ago, not one of you in Syracuse could set foot in a theatre, in a hospital, in a white trade-union. The quarter of the town reserved to us was burnt down at least once a year. Lynching was a weekly amusement. We were refused work. We had to spend nights outside the town boundaries. We were never spoken to ; people made a point of not sitting beside us. . . . You all know how, after five baulked attempts, I was the first to succeed in forcing the doors of instruction and in passing my examinations. (My successes were only valuable to me in so far as they were yours.) There followed the creation of professional schools . . . the raising of morality, and the

campaign against the slums, in which I took a special part. I first knew Syracuse as a small town where the Black was loathed ; and to-day it is a large town where—I shall not go so far as to say that he is liked, but where he has won esteem and respect. The hour of sentimental whining and philanthropic pity . . .”

“ Uncle Tom’s cabin ! ” interrupted a sneer.

“ , . . exactly . . . that hour is past. Our motto is ‘ *Ourself Alone !* ’ ”

“ Hear hear ! No more harping on ‘ the nigger’s just a big child ! ’ ”

“ The peasant of the South is here, in the North a townsman. Never forget, my brothers, that the towns are the cradles of individual liberty ! You are as familiar as I am with our misfortunes. Equality, or segregation—a state within the state, or external colonisation—all these aspects of the Negro problem are familiar to you. And you know it to be insoluble. Yet is there one amongst you all who will not cry out with me before the Stars and Stripes—Loyalty ? ”

A few voices struck up “ Dixie. ”

“ Dark America, but America none the less ! I have not concealed from you the offers I have had from Moscow, or how I rejected them, at the time of the American congress of Black Labour. (In any case, their dollars were fakes.) My programme holds good : Nothing for Revolution, Everything for Education . . .” (There followed a long metaphor borrowed from agriculture.) “. . . the African shores from which the slavers brought your ancestors, the little island of Guinea where their chains can still be seen, the coconut palms—these are dear memories, but they

belong to the past ! Yes, Emerson, Roosevelt and Carnegie all spring from the anthropoid ape, but if they were great men, it was because they were able to forget their caves, and we ourselves shall equal them in so far as we can forget our Africa. The Negro metropolis is not Timbuctoo, it is Harlem, on Manhattan itself ! Dictaphones, radio concerts, aeroplanes—look at what surrounds us, brothers ! these are the playthings of the modern Black ! ”

The atmosphere of the room was charged higher by a July thunder storm. Its doors and windows were blocked by hundreds of bodies, by page-boys, by stenographers whose flesh, here of gilded bronze, there of ebony, showed through the yellow muslin and sea-green cotton of their blouses, while they sucked at their ice-cream cornets. And Doctor Vamp shut his large mouth, black as the depths of a loud-speaker, just lightened here and there by the pink of the tongue. He left the congregation his provisional testament : a poster with the following instructions printed in Gothic characters :

BLACK SYRACUSANS OF THE
20th CENTURY !

DON'T believe in chains !
DON'T tell lies !
DON'T neglect your wives and children !
DON'T forget where you live !
DON'T settle your quarrels with a razor !
DON'T carry bottles of liquor in your pockets .
DON'T shoot at ghosts !

SYRACUSE, OR THE PANTHER-MAN

ENROL in the Association for the Betterment of the Blacks !

BELIEVE in Progress !

BUY the "Syracuse Projector" daily !

Hurrah ! Hurrah ! The Doctor put on his hat. Old negroes clasped his hand in theirs. The young ones acclaimed him with whistles. Flags. The Knights of Samson agreed to meet the next day. A grand parade in gilt uniforms, with spears and rhinoceros-hide shields, was to go right through Syracuse and escort the chief to the station.

Brussels.

The Pan-African Congress has given Doctor Vamp an enthusiastic welcome, and to-day there is a sitting of the Intermunicipal Commission of the Anti-Slum Campaign. One notes Mr. Jack of Sierra Leone, a member of the cabinet, Monsieur Germinal de la Planche of Haiti, Prince Bussu II of Dahomey, Mr. Christopher Baskett of Liberia (a nomad shepherd wandering from capital to capital seeking the green pastures of a Loan), Monsieur Pétrarque Annale, the deputy from Guadeloupe and author of fugitive verse, and Señor Pedrito Guano, the celebrated buck from Havana.

The Malagasy arrives. They are waiting for Zanzibar.

"*A a ne,*" begins one delegate by way of opening the proceedings. "*Nmble Blivago, e go gye ko sika, ge a ne o ka o sika ba, nemble a ne neka ulo. Ge ule kla zo a nimli fe le nimli e . . .*"

After which Monsieur Germaine de la Planche, of Haiti, addressed the meeting in French. He was a sulky-looking octoroon, with the head of a rodent, and a mouth like a talking wound. One wondered what strange malady could be his until one realised that he was a white negro. Yes, he was more like those marble negroes of horrific ugliness that support tombs of the Italian Renaissance. Racked by opposing forces, straddling over three continents, he breathed forth hatred of the White, and particularly, as a dweller in the Antilles, of the United States.

"Our distinguished colleague has just addressed us in a language which I did not understand, but with an admirable oratorical quality which spreads its Ciceronian perfume over a good league round. Hunted down by bloodthirsty mastiffs of the financial oligarchy, by the feudal overlords of chartered companies, and held to ransom on the highways of imperialism, the Black proletariat is awaiting the sunrise of deliverance . . . What 1789 did for the bourgeois, what 1917 did for the workers, the next world-revolution will do for the coloured races. Already the under-dog is everywhere victorious. The Black problem is only a social problem, another aspect of the class-war. Black democracy against White aristocracy. Yes, gentlemen, it is no idle chance that the hour of the masses coincides exactly with our own. For we are the masses, in that they have nothing more compact or unyielding than ourselves. Is it not we who are teaching the startled Universe the oldest collectivism of all—that of Africa, in which the Earth, wherever the corrupt doctrines of the colonial-vampire and the gold-laced grabber have not penetrated, is a goddess who can neither be appropriated nor bought?"

"Exactly!" responded Prince Bussu II. "Nobody wish to buy Earth . . . only wealth, captives . . ."

"Let us plan to reconquer Africa in favour of the Russian Revolution, even as our grandsires contrived to take back San Domingo in favour of the French Revolution. Shame on the gaolers of Marcus Garvey! Shame on the murderers of Sacco and Vanzetti! I spit on the garroters of Nicaragua!"

"I protest in the name of Liberia!" interrupted Mr. Baskett, shooting out his arms like a baobab tree.

"Liberia! The white man's gift to Africa!" sneered Monsieur de la Planche.

"Hyaena's little one," murmured Prince Bussu II, illustrating this exclamation by a Dahomey fable, "find bone and show it to mother hyaena. 'Did father see it?' she ask. 'Yes,' little one answer. 'Then if father see it, you can throw it away, there can be nothing on it.'"

"*Afrika ama Ngisi!*" sneered the Zulu.

"*Marina ny azy!*" shouted the Malagasy.

"Order! Order!"

"*Bara ya Africa hudyitoselba huongokewa hatta isidye tolewa ya ndz ye!*" exclaimed someone in Swahili.

"*Ara gbe!* Turn them out!" came a call in Mandingo.

"*Kjurra!* Certainly." said a Dwala voice.

Vamp listened uncomprehendingly to this flood of savage words. 'The civilisation of the United States,' he reflected, 'is five hundred years ahead of the rest of the world.' Yes, he had sometimes in Syracuse been able to declare, with fleeting conviction, that he was first and foremost an African. But once he found himself with

other Blacks, how far apart from them he felt, how pre-eminently a free subject of great America !

Mr. Jack of Sierra Leone rose :

“ Let us rise superior to these disputes, gentlemen ! The name of Lincoln Vamp is synonymous with scientific exactitude and precision.”

“ And with unconditional positivism ! ” warbled the deputy for Guadeloupe.

“ I propose his election as President of the Commission ! ”

The American delegate's shirt was so well starched that he was elected by acclamation.

It was Doctor Lincoln Vamp's first sight of Europe, the playground continent for the people of the New World. The Belgian countryside was gleaming on that bright Sunday forenoon. The suburban trams were gliding towards their terminus with neither haste nor excessive electrical expenditure. Still wearing his Gentile frock-coat, with the green star emblem of the Pan-African Congress in his button-hole, he had seated himself with much satisfaction in the first-class compartment bound for Tervueren. On the previous day the Belgian government had sent each member of the conference a card of admission to the Museum of the Belgian Congo, and the Doctor lost no time in making use of it. He went through the woods, amongst the tall shafts of pines, pierced by oblique blades of sunlight which blunted their colours on the lovely banks of dewy fern. The Syracusan delegate's nostrils dilated more than ever as he sniffed this fresh scent of water and grass.

These woods were gleaming and restful; nay, had a thrilling scent as of the birth of the world. . . . After three-quarters of an hour the tramway stopped on the outskirts of a park, across which was unfolded the view of a massive, expensive Palace, in an academic style of architecture that pleased the Doctor and reminded him of certain American official buildings: it was the Palace of Tervueren, a former royal residence, which contains the Negro Museum.

Here in glass cases like fish-tanks of light, and amidst a redundancy of Occidental ornamentation and the overlaiden pastry of mouldings, Africa offered herself to his gaze—Africa, in the humility of her working tools, in the dumb, sombre menace of her weapons, in the savagery of her rites. The hirsute shade of King Leopold Midas brooded over these virgin lands, eighty times larger than Belgium. Stuffs displayed their patterned designs, their finely adjusted tones, their sober colourings of ochre, bistre, blood-red, sepia: shellwork seats, tables upheld by twin supporting figures, objects in black basket-work, all slept in their glass cells. Musical instruments, head-dresses worthy of the Ziegfeld Follies, and grotesque masks, made the Doctor laugh. (He never smiled.) He sat down, laid his felt hat beside him, and twisted the strands of his beard. Raising his eyes, he saw the quiet-toned frescoes on the walls representing the river Congo. Landscapes in violet, and in saffron, landscapes of the Saturnian Age, drunken with water . . . he was struck by their majesty and solitude. He felt as if he had already seen all this . . . perhaps in some other life? He had often felt proud of his civic standing, for he knew not only the date of his birth but also the name of his father, a very good man, a member of the

Methodist persuasion and a native of Alabama . . . The mystery began with his grandfather, a slave bought very young at auction in Jacksonville. . . . And the Doctor remembered also how in his childhood he had heard tell of a "Congo Dance" which kept certain vague traditions alive. . . . Possibly his ancestors came from the banks of this flat stream, slow as treacle, overwhelmed by the Equator—and not unlike the Potomac—the thread of which reappeared in each one of those frescoes. A mournful sun, soaring mahogany-trees, autumnal floods. Africa, the land like America, with no poor, no ruins . . . Was he perhaps descended from those two nude savages launching their canoe? He pondered their wretched existence, their flight from the slavers, the runaways who had broken their ban, the terror of wild beasts, of famines, of animals eaten raw—with pelt and feathers. He enjoyed peering into the gulf between past and present, between huts and skyscrapers, between the raffia drawers and the black frock-coat. . . . Seen from a distance, these native cloths seemed to be alive; they were spontaneously reverting to the natural models which had inspired their weavers, to the markings of the panther, the zebra's stripes, the tattoo figurings of butterflies, the slashes of the tiger, the patterned coat of the antelope. . . . The Doctor dreamed of the open spaces where these creatures wandered; his mouth was watering to stalk them, to caress them or slay them. . . . Yes, those horn trumpets and bone fish-hooks, the fine matting, the costumes of peeled bark stitched with acacia needles, the basket-work—all these things were derived solely from noble substances borrowed from sea and forest and living creatures, and even under glass they seemed to

preserve the virtues of these living things as they did their substance. Vamp's eyes, accustomed to the trash of Woolworth's, were left marvelling ; his hands, used to the chill of metal, wandered with delight over these hard woods and soft woods. They called to mind the bare, hairless skin of the negroes, always deep and cool like a cave ; a hot shudder ran up his spine. . . . A healthy art, rooted in toil and suffering, like the songs he knew at home ; an art that was essentially of the people, collective. . . . The Doctor went up to the musical instruments. Here were neither plated saxophones nor electric organs, but tortoiseshell lyres, guitars fashioned of hollowed calabashes, mandolines of crocodile skin, ivory horns, snakeskin gongs : man had collaborated with beast, had come to the aid of nature, to help towards self-expression.

And here Doctor Vamp was walking up and down, quite at his ease in those American style shoes, so broad that they always seem made for the flat feet and spreading toes of negroes—walking amongst fetishes with their white-ringed faces like those of circus clowns, with their looking-glass eyes, and clothed with nails as with bristling furs. . . . He was deeply impressed by the mortuary figures with buffalo heads for the tombs of chiefs, and by those tall twisted forks that surmounted them with their strangely moving forms, like women weeping in despair. A mere chance, after all—if his great-grandfather had hidden in a tree that day, and dodged the Arab slave-dealer and the Portuguese *pombeiro*, he, Doctor Lincoln Vamp, would to-day perhaps be one of the Bakuba chiefs who administer justice on the body of a crouching man, while the queens applaud at each puff of their pipe, or one of those Mongo kinglets who sleep their

last sleep in narrow sarcophagi, canoes without paddles. . . . He thought of his own end, in the Syracuse cemetery, under a sky of granite stained blue by factories, in a tomb with a bare cross. . . . The Cross. . . . He remembered reading in a Sunday supplement that this symbol reached the Whites from Africa, and that Africa had it from Oceanea. . . . He crossed the section of masks, symbols of secret societies, becoming more and more beautiful as the forest grew denser ; masks of coloured beads, blue black and white ; masks with raffia beards, and tubular eyes like those of deep-sea fish ; heads of secret carnivals, in checkered patterns ; ebony hoods of the . . . (he drew near to read) . . . of the Baluba people with deep, concentric tattooing, a mask inscribed with formulae like a book of magic, terrifying muzzles adorned with vermilion goggles. . . . He shuddered. Back at Syracuse the negro population in their gratitude, used often to call him " Medicine-man Vamp." And in very truth he had those vivid, magnetic eyes, shooting wild gleams, by which the old colonists can recognise the occult fetish-men in the villages. And he too, he the constructor of " buildings," the founder of newspapers and banks, had sometimes felt himself the descendant of those rain-makers who are revered in the desert regions, those compounders of philtres for the game-hunters (had he not succeeded in capturing the most elusive prey of all—the dollar ?); but face to face with these long cloaks of wild-beast skins, those triple-crested helmets surmounted by the protective animal of the clan, how comical was the magenta, gold-braided uniform of the Great Steward of the Knights of Samson ! The Doctor reached the head of the staircase, and saw drums as big as cannon, covered with elephant skin ;

under his palms they gave forth a cavernous sound, a sound in which there still sang all the spirits of the woods. . . . He went over to others, still more monstrous, the hollow barrels of the war-drums ; he struck them with his foot, and they throbbed, setting free their sepulchral voice to flood the whole museum with a tide of menace.

It must have been the dinner-hour. The rooms were deserted, the attendants drowsy. But Doctor Vamp did not go. Everything here was redolent of myth ; behind those glass cases all African was murmurous, crying out her summons of music and wildness. The plain harmonious expression of happiness the happiness of the man whom nothing has reft from his soil or his setting who continues to live just where God placed him. . . . The black sorcerers hold ancient objects in the highest esteem because time increases their efficaciousness, infuses them with an invisible potency ; and to judge by the witchery that emanated from these ritual instruments and fetishes, they must be centuries old. In the faculty of piercing the soul of things, those flint spearheads and rusty nails were richer than the science book or the prayer of the White ; they were swifter than these in reaching the core of the great living principle which was called God in the Methodist Church. In the heart of the citizen of Syracuse were reviving those African beliefs which hold the customary habiliments of the dead as so many prolongations of their living persons ; all the soothsayers and necromancers who had wrapped themselves in these sinister trappings, all the souls who had been imprisoned in those calabashes, all the dead hair that had been thrust into these magic amulets, were quickening, were making signs. . . . "Flee !" they were saying, "flee !

Leave the land that is your dwelling-place : her fertility is but a show, and ruin broods over her. Her progress is an illusion. She makes you a vampire, no more. Come back to the land where stones and trees speak in the name of the Spirit . . .”

Vamp found himself between two rows of huts decorated with a chain of red figured patterns running over their clay walls. Shamelessly, right in the open, naked Blacks were carrying on all the acts of life. His snub nose seemed to be sniffing in the steam of the palm-oil stew from the great cauldrons, and he seemed to hear the dull pounding of the grain-crusher in the hollowed tree-trunks. . . . And then, the silence of the negro village at noon. He was a great fetish-man. He was wrapped in an aura of mystery. He drew near, and uttered his oracles in the special dialect. An interpreter of genius, full of scorn for men and their joy in living, he delighted in prophesying for them nothing but drought, famine, and pestilence. He conjured up amorous desires in their most lascivious forms, dallied with unnatural spectacles, and smote women with sterility. He practised circumcision, following forgotten rites. He walked through heaped-up ant-hills of foreskins. He felt himself both strong and full of will, but it was no longer his strength, or his will. A new being dwelt within him. No longer did he practise white magic, the mother of religions, the humane corrective of violence, but the other. . . . Nothing could disarm his wrath, for abruptly he had become maleficent, like life itself.

Suddenly he caught sight of a large stain, as of spilt ink, amidst the clay of his path. Cautiously, for he had become

mistrustful, he moved forward : it was his frock-coat. He did not touch it with his hand, but he sniffed it. As he approached his body came into the sunlight, and a shadow, an extraordinary shadow, took form in the flaming dust : a shadow with two pointed ears, four paws and a tail. A beast was on his trail. Vamp started back : the shadow did likewise. Then he looked at his hands, and saw that his nails had become claws. He touched his body, and his fingers sank into a close silky, pelt. Swinging quickly round, he saw behind him, and growing out from him, a long spine covered with brown spots, like a hundred eyes staring at him. . . .

A cry rang out.

“ The panther ! ”

Instantly he felt his neck set upon by dogs, and ripped open. From behind him the frock-coat crept quickly forward, advancing as best it could to bring him help. The alarm-drum thundered out. And simultaneously, from the left, came the flash of an assegai . . . he felt a vicious pain in his flank. . . .

The next day, Monday, Doctor Vamp did not turn up at the sitting of the Commission. Nor on Tuesday. The Belgian police made an investigation. The custodians declared that about two o'clock in the afternoon they had seen a tall Negro emerging from the Museum, mad—and bellowing;

II
ANTILLES



THE BLACK TSAR

TO DARIUS MILHAUD

“Greasy or not greasy, they will govern you, when their time comes; and they will be just such rulers as you make them. The French noblesse chose to have the people ‘sans culottes’ and they had ‘sans culottes’ governors to their heart’s content. The people of Haiti——”

“Oh, come! . . . The Haitians were not Anglo-Saxons; if they had been, there would have been another story . . .”

*Mrs. Beecher Stowe :
Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

I

AN amphitheatre of hills, broken on the westward by a glimpse of sea. Nine p.m. Faint lingering clouds of sulphur-yellow, like shrapnel puffs. Gigantic thermometers, supplied as advertisements for an American ink, register 95 deg. A smell of burning rises from the sun-

scorched grass ; in the middle of the Champ de Mars, the statue of a soldier thrusts his sword towards constellations hardly yet awake : but it is not Marshal Ney, it is the Negro Emperor Dessalines. All around, the dust has subsided, stirred up by prisoners' fatigue-parties at dawn, by the boots of native gendarmes at noon, and then before sunset by the polo-ponies of American officers.

The Americans ! The instinct of self-preservation has made Occide hate them ever since they got a footing in Porto Rico and Cuba, hate them with all the violence of his black blood, and then with all his pride as a Haitian patriot. Since 1915 the Yankees have occupied the island of Haiti, occupying it, thinks Occide, in defiance of the rights of peoples, and in spite of all the web of lies that their Wilson managed to spin ; they have disbanded the black army, and installed themselves in those barracks alongside the Palace of the President of the Republic, a President who is henceforth their minion. And a Haitian has only to raise a hand, or merely a voice, for the machine-guns to start their spitting. True, no Haitian will stir a finger (sneers Occide) : a race softened by the climate, brutalised by toil, split by factions, debauched by politicians, deserted by the intellectuals—a handful of southern versifiers, would-be Parisian men of fashion, chatterboxes whose earthly paradise was the Café Napolitain, whose official journal was *Aux Ecoutes*, whose lips, more purple than grapes, opened only on the imperfect subjunctive. Their sole dream was of getting published in Paris ; and while they dreamed, the Yanks were tightening the grip on their country. From being the people of Toussaint-Louverture, from drinking the blood of French planters mixed with rum—now, a

hundred years later, to fall to the level of Cuba, of California! To become a machine for sugaring the world, for canning pineapples! Americans! The fairer the complexion of the invaders, the more furious the glitter in Occide's eyes. He ground his teeth at the sight of these white skins through which you can see, as through crystal, the red tides of blood, the blue hydrography of veins. At a pinch, the Latins have points of resemblance to the negroes: you can corrupt them, you can assimilate them. But these others—! He thought with glee of the day when heads would be stuck up in a row in the market, heads of gold, heads at high rate of exchange in the market of the races

But for these Americans, Occide would be a prefect, a general, a member of the State Council; and on account of them, he is nothing, nothing but one of the two thousand barristers of Port-au-Prince.

A fine brute of a mulatto, notwithstanding his forty-six years. No nape to his neck, and a face like a staircase—the lower lip protruding beyond the upper; the latter jutting out beyond the nose; the nose, though well pushed back, projecting still further forward than the forehead; and the forehead running straight back towards a skull-cap of frizzy hair. Yellow bloodshot eyes. The remains of his gentleness are vanishing with his youth.

Occide is no ordinary coloured man. He lives solitary and friendless, able to think without talking, with opinions that are strictly for himself, dispensing with an audience; he even cherishes a secret without turning to a confidant. The

only Haitian whose company he enjoys is Pharamond, a barrister like himself, and formerly a Minister in Paris. In duck-shooting they have a common passion, and they spend hours together in the Léogane marshes.

"You see that gun, Pharamond? It doesn't often miss a right-and-left. How I wish every Haitian had its like! Just think—if all our people had arms!"

"The gun, my dear fellow," said Pharamond solemnly, "is a double-edged tool, like universal suffrage."

"They've taken everything away from these people," Occide continued. "Everything—old flintlock carbines, bombs, and even those pikes hardened in the fire, which were no less formidable in the hands of the 'pikesmen,' our brothers in the South, than in those of the people of Paris on the Tenth of August. . . ."

Pharamond is an affable quadroon, his French speech damascened with Creole words, a compromising opportunist to the fingertips. He answered:

"Have you forgotten, my good friend, what that cost our *cacos*, so lately as January, 1920?"

And Occide saw once again those poor peasants from the North making their way across the island, to fall before the automatic fire of the white troops—helpless, with nothing but the choppers they use for hacking sugar-canes.

"The Americans do their murdering by mass production. The machine-gun has killed politics—just as machinery has killed art," he ended bitterly.

When he was not out shooting, Occide shared his poor, wide-doored house with one old servant woman, a black

THE BLACK TSAR

pig, and two turkeys. At the far end of his study, which had not even a mechanical piano and had only his diplomas as ornament, he rocked in galled idleness in his *dodine*, an armchair of mahogany and vegetable fibre. His spirit was still materialist, and he was like those peevish, spiteful dwellers in Limbo who are exasperated at the forbidden paradise which they can see but cannot contrive to enter. Too poor for Paris, and gnawed by an inferiority complex, he shut himself up in a sealed universe of ignorance, science and hatred, in an abstract world of excessive reading and of technical words. It had led him to socialism.

When darkness fell, he doffed his alpaca jacket and shut up the "Urgent Business" file. Now that the Whites were seated at table, now that he could be sure of not being affronted by them and forced to lower his eyes before them when their damned automobiles hustled and bewildered him, he went out. And carrying his patent-leather shoes in his hand, he plunged into the *mornes*, as they are gloomily called, of the Haitian mountains.

* * * * *

A sky of the deepest blue, upheld by white shafts of palm-trees ; fifty feet up, the arris of the palms, swaying obedient to the breeze, was plastered with the moonlight. Eighteen-carat stars. . . . A turmoil of clouds, building and demolishing great geographical maps, sketching incredible, flocculent continents. . . . Occide thought of the island before the landing of Columbus, before that 6th of December, 1492, when for the first time the Whites brought hither that pale skin of theirs smelling of fish.

Here and there, even in the heart of the town, he came across fragments of the lost paradise, where forest, still almost virgin, encircled the villas where the Palefaces had transported their crazy dream—those Nordic brutes to whom warmth is a luxury, for whom the South is a sweet-meat they never tire of. He had only to forget those suburbs, so easily unpinned and taken down, those thin wooden toys, and he could instantly picture the kindly Indians, butchered by the Spaniards, beside their canoes pulled up on a beach whiter than sugar amid the leaning coconut-palms. . . .

* * * *

As he climbed higher, Occide passed right through Peu-de-Chose, the American quarter. He came along in front of the Club, where no Haitian may enter, as it is barred to men of colour. Often he had halted in the shadow, on the road where it overhangs the barbed-wire enclosure, but had not dared. . . . That evening he heard music, and went on further. It was a concert night. Through the horizontal slats of the shutters he could see rows of heads, and the pink skins, red faces, colourless eyes and bleached hair of these white savages, and the duck uniforms of the Marine and gendarmerie officers.

“Soldiers! Call those soldiers? With no gold lace? Shopkeepers in uniform!”

A shower of notes drenched him; they spurted from the piano, untuned though it was by tropical humidity, with a rushing exuberance and a rich frenzy that went straight to his head. He was exalted by this fanfare as by a token of

deliverance. He thought of his country, of the hymn "1804"—the date of the massacre of the French—the hymn which the Americans had forbidden them to play because it makes the Blacks crazy. . . . And that dozing, official audience was listening to this *Te Deum* as a romance. Literally, Occide thrilled: his muscles quivered of themselves, his features grimaced unbidden; he shook all over; he began to dance; the waves from the pianist's fingers entered into his body, and had to find a way out. He danced like an aged negress, like a warrior smeared with clay, like his whole race.

Occide had never heard Chopin's *Grande Polonaise*, but he was dancing it. . . .

* * * * *

He had fallen, but his head continued to whirl. He no longer felt the pointed pebbles against which he had dashed himself. He saw his spilt blood and tasted it with the tip of his tongue, then with both lips, finding an exquisite savour in it; a trifle more, and he would have opened his veins: blood—warm, insipid, thick blood, with good salt to end up. . . . Four or five centuries had passed since any of his ancestors, precariously descending from an African prince, had quaffed blood, but that night the joy of it was all the keener. To make an exchange of blood between brothers, on the eve of undertaking great adventures, is good; but to decant one's own fluid from one part of the body into another, is better. The design is self-containing, the ends of the circle meet, the soul loses nothing of its substance.

Occide felt that the hour was coming.

He went down the hill at a run right to his own house in Avenue D. He opened the tin trunk—one of those trunks that negroes can carry on their frizzy heads all the way to the railway-station—and extracted a ten-gallon petroleum-can. With the utmost care, after wrapping it in an old flour-sack, he hoisted it under his arm.

Again he climbed the road to the American Club. . . .

The moon had risen higher. Implacably it clipped the outlines of the tin roofs beneath him, but without biting on the dim foliage of the mango-trees ; over beyond the soft platinum of the sea, mountains were trying to outline themselves, but only half-heartedly. Everything seemed to be standing expectant, motionless—even the fans of the banana-trees, even the spokes of the palm-leaves. And now Occide was looking out over the foreign quarter. These openwork houses of the Whites, striped with their long, semi-transparent awnings, were slung out like the oiled paper lanterns of that Japanese fête held in the old days by the Port-au-Prince Club. Gramophones were hawking hoarsely. . . .

Occide looked at his watch : now ought to be the time. . . . And yet it ought to be over by now. . . . Had the fuse gone out ?

In the mountain behind him, Occide heard a rhythmic sound, a dull hammering. It was not the *martinique*, the popular Saturday-night dance, but a deep and stifled summons, the summons of the great Voodoo drum. . . . A glad omen ? Or a signal ? The Americans could scatter fines like hail, and track down those who kept the ritual alive, and burn those drums—but they had never put a stop to anything. . . .

And Occide stood there suspended between the gramophone below and the drum above, between the shellac disc and the taut goatskin, between city and mountain, equidistant from body and spirit, from America and Africa. . . .

Suddenly everything was ripped by a jet of flame. Earth stabbed sky. A report filled the harbour to overflowing, ruptured the dark and the moon. Sparks. Fumes. Smoke.

And then, falling back out of silence—darkness and the moon.

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The American Club—the Club where negroes were not admitted—had vanished into a great funnel scooped out by dynamite.

II

The Haitians are good walkers. By dawn Occide was in the mountains. He steered clear of the police-station at Terre-Rouge, without stopping : in any case, how was he to stop, or where ? The houses up here shun the roadway, in dread of the main roads down which pass the armed bands, and take refuge behind the sugar-canes and the impenetrable cactus. From a hiding-place in the rocks Occide took a bird's-eye view of the countryside, right down to Port-au-Prince. The sun leap into the air, flooding the plain of the Cul-de-Sac river in his rear. Wedged between the sea and the lake, it was squared with cubes of soft green—the cane.

Charcoal fires flattened their smoke in unison towards the bay.

For greater security, Occide made as if for Mirebalais, and then struck over at a sudden tangent towards the frontier of San Domingo. He contrived to lose himself, from the next day, in those derelict domains where large-scale cultivation has been abandoned since the days of the colony; and he found a welcome there from the poor isolated peasants. He assumed their blue cotton overalls, their hat of fan-palm leaves, and their cane-felling cutlass, and he started in on the same hard toil as themselves! In the morning, a cup of coffee before dawn; at noon, a glass of white rum; and only in the evening, a dish of rice and red beans: and then—headlong into sleep. Sometimes the women went off a great distance to market, the young ones carrying on their heads the gourds full of syrup, with a chaplet of live turkeys slung by the feet from their girdles, and the old ones following up, still mounting their asses side-saddle, in the French style, with a slipper balancing on the tip of the big toe. Here, behind these thorns, Occide found the sum and substance of Africa implanted, intact as the Negroes had brought it, and just as chance had split it up centuries ago, when it had taken instantaneous root. After all the half-breeds and bastards of the town, who would suspect the existence of these Senegambian giants, these blue-eyed Zulus, indolent Bambaras and dog-eating Dahomeyans, these hilarious, dancing negro-boys, still clinging to the single file of their ancestral Congo when they walked?

Occide, the extenuate man of colour, the "skin-upstart" as the Whites say, envied all of them their beauty; he could

not covet their strength—for even these one-time Africans had grown debilitated: nobody can live unscathed in the balmy Antilles, in these tropics *de luxe*, a land with no perils no chase, no snakes, no wild beasts. . . All these people however, were hard workers. And Occide did as they did. After he gave up wearing boots, the only thing that still distinguished him from this plebs, they no longer called him “captain,” but just “mate”; he preferred that. He walked on his bare feet, the undersides of which were lighter than the rest of his body and looked like red rubber soles. Nobody dreamed of asking where he came from; it was enough that he gave a hand in taming this prodigal soil, untilled since the French had left it, a soil as fiery as an unworked stallion. While the Blacks sweated they sang—magnificent things which it rejoiced Occide to listen to; manual work had filled him with the sudden, if fleeting, intoxication of the intellectuals. . . . He now felt as if he too had been hurled some immense distance by the explosion of his infernal machine, away amongst ancient slaves, far into the recesses of time. He had a tradition that traced his descent from African princes, but he felt himself the grandson of slaves, one of those fine “Indian pieces” that the old slavers used to value, and which they paid for in cowries, rolls of tobacco, guineas, shells—all the strange currency of the dark continent; a negro chained up ’tween-decks; a negro branded with his owner’s initials, sold at auction, bartered for print cloth or Dutch pipes; a runaway nigger dragged along with a fork on his neck, his wrist in the pillory, with pepper on his wounds, nailed by the ear, or caught eating the sugar-cane during work and muzzled with an iron mask. . . . Hard dying, hard living.

“The black race will conquer!” Occide vowed to himself. He would never see anything worse than the past days. But now he would be satisfied by no short-lived vengeance. “Burn their houses! Cut off their heads!” Once again those battle-cries would be heard, the cries of the holy war against the first French settlers. . . . And what were all these thousands of sugar-mills, indigo-works, cotton-mills, coffee-mills, which the prosperous masters boasted on the eve of 1789, if not the toil and sweat and blood of the Negro? It had been a maleficent activity, that of these Frenchmen—who were really the Yankees of the eighteenth century: Occide preferred the vast wilderness of the nineteenth century, with the land run to waste, the irrigation works smashed, the harbours silted up since the days of the Negro republic, the ultimate wisdom of a race contented with little, like all those who are beloved of God. 1804 to 1915—a century of liberty! Such miracles are not easily forgotten. But alas, government by coloured gentlemen whose heads are swollen with their Sorbonne diplomas, is bound to leave its mark. . . . And Occide saw all too clearly how the fatal story unrolled: the politics of faction-intrigues, speculation, and at last, as the ultimate sanction—the stout baton of the American policeman. Yes, a younger race had now taken over the torch of the Aryan family from the hands of the French; and once again it was the law of White crushing Black. And the same Whites! Underneath the modern cement road which the American engineers imagined they were constructing in Haiti, will you not always find the ancient causeway of the Kings of France?

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A month passed. Occide had no wife. He did as the day-labourers do ; he lay in ambush at night and fell upon the first comer, a luscious young girl with mauve flesh and greased hair. He threw her down, and thrust as abruptly as the hornet does the rose. After which, calmer, he suffered at the thought of being merely an ageing, hard-voiced mulatto, with feet and hands too small, and protruding ears, over against this lovely negress with her jutting, pointed breasts, her skin smooth as plaster, her eyes inset with a tracery of white. Compared with her he saw himself an "incoherent" half-breed : the anthropological term had struck him. And morally too, he was "incoherent." He felt himself damaged by towns, by books, by manufactured products. He was no longer one of his own race, he belonged to a race apart. He thought of those Arab countries where mulattoes are called "the Greens." For she was black and polished like obsidian. When she talked her voice seemed tiny, a voice to match the size of her mind ; but when she sang, it was a voice as compelling as that of wild creatures in the forests calling to each other at mating-time. Her name was Désirée Désir.

For two months longer Occide lived this life amongst these old-time slaves who danced, not the Charleston, but the minuet and the gavotte, to the sound of a flute muted with silk paper. . . . Sometimes one of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit would spend a night in the uplands, arriving on a piebald horse with his egg-shaped helmet, his blue spectacles, and his quinine. Another time it would be the old parish priest from Sourire who came up to say Mass

in the stable. He ended the office with prayers for the health of his Highness the Dauphin. . . . Occide took pleasure in all that, and was anxious to prolong this new delight. But he repented the moment after, for he was stern with himself, though inconsequent. He had tamed his rebellious spirit to study, and now he wished to master his coward body, forswearing this well-being of the high places, this quiescence of the senses, after nights in Désiré's hut, that mahogany cabin with its scented roof of camphor-wood. To heroes, he reflected, love is a poison.

"Girls prick you like the dwarf palm-tree," his father used to say to him long ago. "If you want to succeed, you'd do better to follow the old negroes, those who talk to themselves in the street. Listen to their ramblings: those are secrets. . . ."

Occide remembered this advice, and ceased to frequent the negress. In any case, she was making a fool of him, and was cheerfully circling round the fires from one man to the next, like a pipe. . . .

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One evening when he heard the note of the *lambi* calling from one hilltop to another—the pink conch which the *papalois*, or witch-doctors, use to communicate with each other at full moon—Occide got up, and kept walking in the direction of the nearest sound until he reached it. . . .

Was this a dream, in the starlight?

He found himself in an amphitheatre of rocks, lined all round with peasants, ranged as if for a cock-fight, their faces roasted blacker than coffee. Down in the centre, he himself was like a corpse in the well of a dissecting-theatre. . . .

A man came forward, bristling with tufts of humming-

bird feathers, with a chopper in his hand. He strove to summon the demons by gibberish, by putrefied foodstuffs, by incantations ; and when he seemed certain of their presence, he slashed the air into thin slices about him. Occide waited, stiff with terror in every limb. This armed bird with the human face horrified him. He knelt down like the others, his face on the ground . . . When he straightened himself again he saw the witch-doctor holding up a head. And Occide recognised that head : it was his own, cut off ; yes, his own head, with his gold teeth and tarry skin, and with great unwinking eyes. Beside him, like sacerdotal nurses, assistants in hooded gauze robes were fanning his gaping, stanchd neck, careful that no fly should settle on it. Occide made as if to lay a hand on himself, but they restrained his movement. And then—with what eyes ?—he saw the executioner, still holding his stemless trophy by the ears, come forward and settle it, like a knight's helm on his shoulders. Occide rose up and began to dance.

Occide was seeking a certain man who had been pointed out to him.

He entered a leafy thicket, and there appeared before him an old man with white eyebrows on a face riddled like a cork with smallpox, and a torn shirt that showed bones more gnarled and charred than charcoal. It was the witch-doctor.

“Greetings !” said Occide.

“Hail !” answered the old man.

Occide made an offering of rum and turkeys, brought from the plantation the day before.

"For your safeguarding Monsieur Clairvoyant," he said. The other offered coffee in his turn.

Miracles, cures, brews of simples—Occide was prepared for these kind, womanly attentions: but not for what he divined in this man when he had peered into his depths.

"Follow me," said Clairvoyant.

They walked for a long time. The odour of mouldering vegetation was succeeded by the dryness of the heights, in which the most subtle essences lost their properties. The forest took both of them back to itself: a refuge, to-day as yesterday, for them as for their ancestors. They reached an "accursed fig-tree," thrusting up from the ground on its membranous roots; on certain of its branches hung necklaces. On a flat stone Occide noticed tibias, an old sword, signs of the zodiac, a bottle of Pernod; and he recognised a *humfort*, an altar of the Voodoo cult.

"What you did was well done, my son," said Clairvoyant. "Still, the hour is not yet. Your hand . . ."

Occide stretched out his pink palm, its lines engraved in bistre.

"We have still to suffer, and you have still to learn: for you know nothing . . ."

Occide was about to retort that he was a doctor of laws, a graduate in philosophy, a noted orator, on the staff of the *Tonnerre Haïtien*.

". . . and first of all, you must forget. You use your mouth too much."

"I have often pleaded in court," said Occide proudly, "but I have only delivered one single speech . . . And that was three months ago, under the floor of the American Club . . . I was heard that night for sixty miles all round!"

"I know, I know . . . Do you suppose that when Clairvoyant wants to know something, he needs to look through a mule's ear, like any old woman?—First of all, make your peace with animals, with vegetables, with minerals. All: they're the same family. Recognise your kindred. Without them, you're helpless. Do you dream? Can you dream?"

"What do you mean?"

"Truth dwells in dreams. Dreams have the same weight as deeds."

Occide had forgotten the night of his decapitation. When wide awake he had little faith in fortune-telling. It was ambition that had brought him to the witch-doctor, for he had been told that the brothers of this caste can read the future, and he was certain that the future was full of him. The sabbath was no farce; behind it lay the science of poisons, and the possession of souls.

"I want to rouse these peasants, raise a troop, and march on the capital . . ." Occide explained, like a true Haitian.

"Not worth the trouble," said Clairvoyant. "You'll conquer without soiling your fingers."

"And the Americans?"

"The day will come when they'll all pack up."

* * * * *

Far away from his desk, his codes and digests, Occide was dematerialised by the hill air and by plain living. Like all the gregarious Blacks, he was lost when he was solitary. He felt as if he were becoming an automaton. No longer did he think in general ideas—he who bled himself to

subscribe to twenty European journals ; and the first fruits of Parisian intellectualism (although he hid it from himself, affecting to despise them) simply fell into the void when once he had been deprived of them. That literature was a tonic to him ; without it, he lost his footing. He yielded to absurd rites. He bowed to a complete renunciation of women. The old man gave him a draught ; and that very night he thought he vomited thorns, shark's bones, balls of hair, splinters of glass . . .

Nevertheless, in spite of his docility and his desire to be born into the life of magic, Occide did not feel the inner surge of that all-radiant force which the medicine-man had promised him. On the contrary, he felt as if his consciousness were sinking.

It was enough for him now to pass a purely animal existence, among goats and pigs, breathing the horrid smell of sour milk, wood-smoke and excrement, and plunged back, by way of exile, into the immense womb of the soil. He was stuffed with incomprehensible formulæ which he learned by rote : it was Hebrew—for Voodoo is a brother to the Kabbala. When cocks and goats were butchered, the sight of the blood pouring from their throats roused him to a frenzy ; he came nearer so as to be more freely spattered. Initiation widened his knowledge, and he learned how there are only two races, the black, then the white ; that these are also moon and sun, woman and man, water and fire, reason and love ; that Jesus was a mulatto and that the Messiah will be the offspring of a White man and a Black woman.

"To-morrow, all will be well for the half-breed," said Clairvoyant.

The new moon came.

The evening it touched the full, it leapt up enormous from the earth, so rapidly that the eye, by taking the clouds as a mark, could follow it in its course. And that night the tellers of tales were left deserted . . . Up astride the big boxes ! The rhythmic fury of the *martinique* rang out in the plain : every stomach was in movement, stomachs of dancers as well as of the dense ring of onlookers, children and old men. At Anse-des-Pipes, at Source-des-Misères, at the Crique-à-Juif, on the Ile-à-Vache, at Saltrou, the negroes were dancing amid the thudding of drums, back against belly, and clapping their hands.

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Clairvoyant led Occide to the accursed fig-tree. All round it the roots had sucked the earth bone-dry, and nothing would grow in this glade but dwarf cactus-plants ; the prickly vegetation drew blood from the hands. The magician traced a circle, took the Haitian's hands, and lowered them to touch the soil ; Occide felt his limbs turn stiff in the joints . . . The air was rarefied. And the next moment he found himself stretched on the ground . . . His body was drenched with sweat, gleaming like the bodies of the old-time slaves oiled by their masters to hide the scab on them . . . Against Occide's body Clairvoyant was pressing a great lump of rock-crystal wrenched from the hillside . . . He felt it cold on his skin . . . He was splitting asunder . . . The thing was entering into the jelly of his flesh. And he trembled, knowing now that he was dealing with one of those terrible "soul-eaters " . . . When the sorcerer had inserted three large icicles under his skin, he stitched him up again . . .

Studded thus with stones, Occide travelled far and wide in space. He saw snow, smoke, factories, buried temples . . . The world swam into his vision as it really is, smooth for all its relief, all the human breaks on its surface, a globe of oceans, so liquid in their unity, so abstract in their fluidity, that they enchanted him. The bottom of the seas was opened for him, no longer merely the sterile surface.

And every night now he drew himself from his sheath, emerged from himself as from a house. He saw his own gestures and heard his outward voice, finding in them subtle shades, surprises, and countless new aspects which enlightened him about himself. When he was tired with racing through space, he came and sat down near his sleeping body.

III

Eight years later—the miracle has been completed. The Republic of Haiti is freed from the oppressor. No more negroes : only Blacks.

The Yankees withdrew during the month that followed the opening of hostilities between the United States and Japan, after the indecisive battle of Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands. They were faced by the threat of a general rising in the black island. Not a shot was fired. The High Commissioner, the gendarmerie, the customs, the experts, the technical advisers, the councillors—all who waxed fat on the wealth of those negroes they despised—

packed up their aeroplanes, their detective novels, and their machines for dancing, calculating, and making ice.

No relic now remains of the American occupation except the official automobiles, confiscated by the provisional Haitian government; only one policeman survives, a quadroon from Chicago, forgotten beneath his parasol, continuing to make rigid signals at the corner of Avenue C and Avenue M; but no one believes in him any more, and when he tries to move on the old dames from the market, they just turn their backs on him. A new president is installed in the National Palace on the Champ-de-Mars, the style of which is such a happy reminder of the small palace of the Champs-Élysées. And the said new president is Occide.

Here he is, dignified, self-possessed, constitutional. No gold-laced aide-de-camp, no retinue of petitioners, no policemen on motor-bicycles with whistles between their teeth. Occide rides about in simplicity, just as the principal citizen.

Since the troops left, however, the hatred of the White rose everywhere to such a pitch that the *corps diplomatique* had reason to think it was endangered; prudently, the accredited ministers wanted to cry out before they were touched; and they found the right man to talk to. Occide gave them their answer: he would put no obstacle in the way of their departure. Haiti could live without Whites. And in a leader in the *Tonnerre*, inspired by Occide, one could read these words:

O splendid Aryans! Creators of phantom riches, filchers of political liberties! Now do we know your feebleness for what

it is, poor weaklings that you are, powerless to take root, helpless against the sun, the everlasting prey of your lymphatic glands, your myopia, your fevers. Back then to your litanies and your quibbling principles! Back to the paternosters of your ruthless imperialism! Farewell, O Machiavellis!

Soon after Haiti's official rupture of relations with foreign peoples of the white race, a steamer flying the Soviet flag dropped anchor off Port-au-Prince. Some Tartar sailors, their heads shaven smooth as calabashes, came ashore to ask all due facilities for their cruising trade-fair. These were granted. Comrade Austerlitz was the officer in command, and as she ranked as the head of a foreign deputation, cannon were fired.

Occide climbed the companion-ladder to return Comrade Austerlitz's visit.

"Madam . . ."

"Call me *tovarish*: or rather, use my first name—Barricade . . . We've finished with saints from the calendar . . . Look, that Lieutenant's name is Proudhon."

"We have been doing that in Haiti for over a hundred years," answered Occide.

Everything amazed him: the captain's uniform of red and green, matching the port and starboard lights, the samovar, the statistics regarding syphilis. This old German hospital-ship, captured during the war and somehow not returned after Brest-Litovsk, had been converted into a floating nursery of propaganda. The armour plating of the *Nitchevo* might be a modest grey on the outside, but inside, everything was red, like a heart. A life-

size Lenin presided at the banquet table, which was laden with fancy dishes, sturgeon, caviare, and various gastronomic rareties. Over the sideboard was inscribed Chamfort's phrase: "*The Poor are the Negroes of Europe.*" Electric fans, set within hollowed blocks of ice, gave off the most delicious coolness. Occide could hardly tear himself away from the moving pictures, or from the coloured graphs which demonstrated with dry precision the bankruptcy of the West. He was quite dazzled by the chief products of Russia, presented on glass positives with the most alluring technical words. He rushed into lavish orders, and promised to return the next day.

Next day there was a masked ball on board, attended by the whole of Port-au-Prince wearing costumes in the French style. Comrade Austerlitz had blacked herself to represent a negress, and wore a red velvet gown from a great Moscow dress-designer, Worth by name. She had not forgotten the lessons of the Baku School of Colonial Revolts concerning the utility of small gifts, and under pretext of a lottery, Occide received armfuls. He carried back with him photographs, the works of Karl Marx and of Lenin, including the text of the famous speech to the second congress of the Third International dealing with propaganda amongst negroes; he received the portrait of the new champion of Javanese revolt, the Malay Semaung, as well as a gift of sables. The Dictator had to promise to send the most likely pupils from the schools to Moscow. He agreed to the despatch of Commissaries of the People to Port-au-Prince in order to set up there a society analogous to the Asiatic D.O., or Death Organisation.

The ship steamed off again, after unloading more pam-

phlets, several tons of them. Occide was never done singing the praises of Comrade Barricade Austerlitz. But the Haitians did not join in the chorus ; under the potent influence of their wives, a conservative and even reactionary tribe, they affirmed that the Moscow Worth was not so good as the Galeries Lafayette, that the officers of the cruising-fair were poor waltzers, and, touchily, that the Russian woman had meant to affront them by getting herself up as a negress ; in short, that this so-called fair-ship was no more than a fire-ship.

Occide felt that he was misunderstood, made no answer, and once more wrapped himself in dogged silence.

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Occide is awaiting his hour.

Everything combines to make the Dictator bide his time : the strength of the Provisional Government, in which the harmonious play of laws gives him shape and substance ; the absence of partisans ; the lack of armed force. Yes, he is waiting for the machine-guns ordered in Mexico to be secretly landed on Tortuga Island. Then—we shall see ! But for the moment he is working on the army, sounding the administration. On his balcony he has two guns, one pointing at his enemies, and the other levelled on his troops. Motionless, like an alligator in the mud, jaws tight closed, he keeps a constant eye on the *gourdes** accumulated by the American administration in the public treasury . . .

Nevertheless, the good seeds scattered to the trade-winds

*Haitian money : value 5 (paper) francs.

by Comrade Austerlitz were beginning to sprout. Reading the propaganda pamphlets, Occide saw the wonderful synoptic tables, the fascinating drawings and pictures, in which the Anglo-Saxons were treated according to their merits; thanks to the colour plates like genealogical trees, one could take in at a glance the world-wide ramifications of the Soviet organisation. Gradually Occide came to dream of being an advanced outpost of the Black world, a loaded gun pressed behind the ear of the United States. Haiti would be the "negative" of Moscow . . .

And this idea sent his boundless negro arrogance soaring into immensity . . . When he had thrust his bomb under the American Club eight years ago, he had not been wreaking a personal revenge, he had not envisaged a national service (as the great Electors of Port-au-Prince had imagined when they raised him to the Presidency, although they were now regretting their decision); no, he had been a forerunner of militant Bolshevism. When he spent those years living in rural retreat, his life close-knit to his people's, his hands sharing their toil, Occide had simply been letting the line of his own genius lead him to the cross-roads where all the great thinkers of the age meet. In short, what had Clairvoyant taught him from the night of his initiation, if not that the knell of the Western world has been tolled; that the hour has struck for the coloured races, for the disinherited of yesterday; that commerce is foul and riches detestable?

For three months the future President did not sleep. From the street he could be seen with his hard, black cannon-ball of a head gripped in his pink-nailed hands, working on Bukharin's *Principles of the Chinese Revolution*.

Raising his eyes to the stars, which the coming of the dry season had wiped clear of their mist, he cast a sweeping glance round the lagging world of the Blacks: Yankee negroes, poor machines on the bourgeois model, candied in puritanism; Brazilian negroes, degraded by crossing their stock with the Indians; African negroes, savages crushed under the heels of Western imperialists!

It was up to the negroes of the Antilles, to himself, Occide, to lead the way!

He unbosomed his projects to a few safe men. Not to his friends, for he had none: that indulgence as all others he had renounced, happy in this imitation of Lenin, who had foresworn his favourite enjoyment—music. He recruited his men amongst the French convicts escaped from Cayenne, and Dutch deserters from Curaçao. Secretly he began to build up his Red Guard from amongst the Chinese laundrymen. Not a word in any circumstances to his ministers, old bohemian students, romantic poetasters, sly opportunists always ready to betray him. The Council Meetings which they imposed on him were an exasperation. They were incorrigible chatterboxes, whose quarrels of democrats against radicals, radicals against progressives, were only a reflection in the political field of the atavistic guerilla wars of African clan against African clan. But Occide still handled them gently, for public opinion was on their side.

“The Constitution, my dear fellow . . .” Pharamond began. (He had nearly died of an intestinal stoppage through swallowing hostile voting-papers on the day of Occide’s election, and considered he had a claim for *gratitude on this score*.)

"Perhaps a *referendum vox populi*?" hazarded Waldeck-Rousseau.

"All that sort of thing is just surface show, academic playthings, and nineteenth-century at that," answered Occide drily.

"My dear fellow, our work must inscribe on the mar-moreal front of the edifice—*opus ædificandi*—the word Peace, the divine word . . ." said Ça-ira Coriolanus. (His tenure of office came from his having a mascot in the shape of a letter from Victor Hugo to one of the Coriolanus family, ending with the words: "I place my two white hands between your two black hands . . .")

Occide shrugged his shoulders.

"Idiots! War! War, again and always war! Darwin! Survival of the fittest!"

"Thank you kindly!" answered Hieronymus Michelet, a pure Fan type. "Idiots, I dare say; but maybe quite ready to die for our country!"

"I expel from the Council anyone who still utters that out-of-date phrase, 'our country'! To-morrow morning, five o'clock, Lamartine—I shall expect your report on aviation. At seven, Mésamours will come and discuss the prefects . . . And no laughing about me!"

* * * * *

One cannot watch too closely the alterations of a man's dress, the evolution of the cut of his hair, the advent of new accessories . . . If only it had been noticed in time that Occide was rubbing his head with sandpaper, that he was struggling to achieve a small pointed beard, that he never went out without a leather satchel under his arm,

that he was delivering his speeches, like Lenin, with one hand in his pocket—many surprises would have been spared. The day that he held a review wearing metal-rimmed pince-nez like Trotsky (the refraction of the light from their glasses made him look like an African fetish), it was clear that the Rubicon was about to be crossed.

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And in very truth, at eight o'clock on that morning of December 13th, 193—, police officers in motor-cars halted in front of the banks and demanded the keys of the strong-rooms. The foreign cashiers in their cages were powerless to raise a finger, their nickelled six-shooters notwithstanding. Lorry loads of deeds and stock and grubby paper-money, with tons of dollars, were driven off. At noon Occide issued an edict proclaiming the nationalisation of the banks. While Port-au-Prince was prostrated under the vertical blaze, just when the sentries of the yellow prison were dozing in their loggia, the doors of the gaols opened and swallowed up the members of the Provisional Government. But nobody was astonished, and the prisoners themselves, in spite of their sad plight, felt for the first time since the departure of the Americans that Haiti had once and for all regained her freedom, that the golden age was once more dawning. That night gun-flashes were seen again in the town, flickering and luminous like fire-flies; along the roads automobiles were found without wheels, and saddled horses whose riders had been mysteriously ravished away. And finally, the Haitian flag (which is, of course, only the old French flag robbed of its white, a colour suspect from all points of view, and with its blue and red symbolising

the union of negro with mulatto) was still further simplified and became the Red Flag: the only point was that the *coromacaque* and the sugar-cane chopper—the two national implements—replaced the Russian hammer and sickle. By midnight, Occide's grand idea was a reality: the Union of the Republican Socialist Soviets of Haiti.

U.R.S.S.H.


In this way was born the modern Black International, the creation of which was to be the pendant to the Republic of a century before, after the liberating campaign of Toussaint - Louverture. Toussaint - Louverture — greater than Napoleon; Occide—greater than Lenin.

And that night the first soviets of peasants and soldiers were improvised at Mirebalais and Rondeau-Joli, while the Dictator, aided by the Revolutionary Committee of Haiti and Adieu-au-Monde, the professor of constitutional law, drew up the charter of negro communism at the Palace. At dawn Occide assumed the first name of Vladimir, and Port-au-Prince, which took its name long ago from some forgotten Rohan, was unbaptised, and called Octobreville in memory of the great October Revolution in Russia. The radio instantly gave the news to the world, a real electro-magnetic shout, mystically linking up Tropics and Pole, sun and snow. One stroke on the farther side of the planet had achieved what the propaganda factories of the U.R.S.S. had not yet been able to compass, in spite of all their millions of dollars, rupees, lei, pesos and Maria Theresa crowns, at the hour when the universe was still awaiting a rising in India, a definite insurrection in China. One man, and one alone, had done it!

"I am a technician of revolution," Occide kept saying,

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"simply a technician." He loved that word; he wore it like a ring.

With the reaction subdued, Occide began to cut a figure as national hero. Already the populace were comparing him to Dessalines, or to King Christopher, the one-time cook. The party cards, on red paper, won general favour; for red is the negro's favourite colour. When he spoke of "the red centurions," the phrase made his fortune instantly. Old generals no longer on the pay-list, champing the bit as managers in lonely plantations, furbished up their spurs. There was no more imitating the Americans. There were real innovations now. In spite of the heat, Occide endowed the new formations with reindeer boots and Mongol helmets. They enrolled in their hundreds, and the promise made by d'Alaux was kept: "Every Haitian who is not a general will at least be a soldier." "Discipline of iron, units of steel," roared Occide, and the Red Guard was forbidden to pillage, even in an orderly way, as in the patriarchal days of President Salnave. On Tuesday, January 16th, foreigners were expelled from the island; on Wednesday, the 17th, Occide established moving-pictures gratis, and suppressed marriage; on the 18th, religions; on the 19th, the family. With memories of Clairvoyant, the Dictator authorized the unhampered practice of Voodoo. Just as in the early days of the old Independence, when coins had been struck in its image, the sacred serpent reappeared. In the Cathedral, transformed into the Great Temple, monkeys were bred, and phallic emblems in mahogany were set up, before which the young people from the schools came trooping, reciting Creole poetry. Whatever religion  lost, magic acquired.

To increase the authority of the witch-doctors, they were provided with moujik blouses and a red armlet, and appointed Delegates of the Black International. They, in their turn, pushed implacably on towards the Terror: for blood is ever the god's choice nutriment, and his most splendid festival.

Forward, then! On to the Terror! Occide recalled that Lenin himself had not disdained to take an example from the French Revolution. Well, what had happened in Haiti in 1789? The island was peopled with inert slaves who, by themselves, without the French Jacobins, would never have dreamt of revolt. Luckily some lofty spirits of the Left, Mirabeau and Lafayette, had managed to take the offensive; in 1786 they had founded the society called "Friends of the Blacks," undertaking to sprinkle the colonies with pamphlets inciting the coloured folk to revolution. In 1791 they were saying, "Perish the colonies rather than a principle!" In 1794 the thing had happened. But was it thanks to the Blacks? Not a bit. There again the French Convention had to take action by itself. Its commissioners, Polvérel and Sonthonax, landed from Paris. Apathy of the slaves confronted by the cap of liberty! Then Sonthonax, in person, set up his guillotine on the main square of Port-au-Prince, and convoked the people. Twenty thousand Blacks! Behold him, before their eyes, with his own hands cutting off the head of a royalist—and holding up the white head to the negroes! But so backward were these Blacks, and so religiously imbued with the idea that a white man is next to God, and so horrified were they, that instead of rejoicing they were ashamed, cried out "Sacrilege!" and took the guillotine to pieces!

It was not till later that the slaves acquired a taste for the business, and in the end took up their own course of sawing their masters asunder between two boards—and with such zest that the Commissioners of the Convention went that way too. But a whole century of waiting thought Occide, has been needed for the emergence of all the happy consequences of that simple gesture of Deputy Sonthonax presenting the negroes with the head of his white brother. And to-day Occide is obliged to identical efforts to advance towards Progress. The peasants understand nothing, and hide their crops; money has vanished, for the Dictator wished to return to the old African bartering, with the calabash of syrup as the monetary standard. But, alas! the country districts still believe in the dollar. Yet the more the obstacles pile up, the more doggedly does Occide become set in his negro pride. A malignant fever grips him. He gets no sleep. But he does not yield an inch. He unifies; he standardises; he nationalises. He nationalises sugar, pineapples, women. Sex, bananas, cocoanuts—aren't these all gifts of nature, and therefore gratuitous? As of Dessalines, so it must be said of him that he spared no man in his wrath, no woman in his lust. He is sustained by the example of the great Dessalines, and re-reads his history:

“Soldiers!” exclaimed Dessalines, “do you not recognise me? I am your Emperor!” The Emperor Dessalines seized the coromacaque slung to the pommel of his saddle, and whirled it round his head . . .

Blood flows in the island, from Bombardopolis to Chou-

Palmiste. The secret police make arrests on private information. The eighteen thousand officials no longer feel secure from one day to the next. Happy are those who can independently "find an opportunity to seek foreign strands"—that is how these people speak of exile.

At the same time Occide's mind experiences one of those abrupt reversals so common amongst negroes. Absolute power is intoxicating him ; it is giving rein to his instincts ; and his will to power explodes. To-morrow, if it were still fashionable, he would be King. He has triumphal arches set up to himself. He seizes the goods of the contumacious. His taste for gifts, roused by Comrade Austerlitz, now knows no bounds. Gifts !—he receives them from Moscow, from Dahomey chiefs, from red-capped negroes on the sleeping-cars of the Atlantic Line, from deputies in Martinique. The province sends him old Spanish doubloons and French *louis* that have lain buried for centuries. The whole army toils on his plantations. Occide is now worth twenty million dollars. And he counts them up at night, on the big scales for weighing the sugar.

The announcement of the bold social experiments of this learned automaton made the Black world, which is ever eager for novelty, quiver like dough baked to the exact point and just about to rise. The Negro soviets of the Transvaal, the coffee-coloured anarchists of Chicago, the Senegalese "cells" of Marseilles, all hailed him as a genius. From his balcony, and using an amplifier as he had seen it done on the *Nitchevo*, Occide read out their addresses to the people—"Telegrams from Hai-Nan, at three dollars the word ! If Southern China has been the first to revolt

it is because she herself has a touch of negroid blood in her . . . !” After which, exploiting the enthusiasm, he had a round-up among the idlers, and forced them to take their part in the public works destined to embellish the State.

And then the new recruits could be seen, like ants in Indian file, carrying on their heads the American cement, the Italian marbles, the sand from the Artibonite river . . . But it was no new building that was being raised : it was the old National Palace decorated with gilded bulbs and giant onions, in course of becoming the Haitian Kremlin. Numerous workmen died.

* * * * *

Occide was bored.

“ You ought to try travel,” hinted Pharamond, now the state chamberlain.

But Occide knew quite well that he would be deposed as soon as he reached Santiago.

“ Travel ! Do men like me travel, my friend ? Did you see Colbert going to London, Leo the Thirteenth going to San Francisco, Marat going to Pekin ? Travel ! That should be left to Jews ! Traders ! Snobs ! Neurotics ! Pimps ! Pianists ! ”

“ Well, have a try at literature—poetry——! ” whispered Vercingetorix Médor.

* * * * *

Haiti was calm. Occide was weary of red parades and red centurions, and languid to-day in his opening of the Haitian Institute of Red Propaganda (H.I.R.P.), and in

delivering his address, copied, it must be owned, from an old issue of *L'Humanité* : " Opposed to retrograde propaganda, I favour the propaganda which will advance . . . etc." He was giving way to eloquence, he who had once been so short and terse : " Gentlemen, the Revolutionary Committee will warmly cherish . . ." There was reviving in him what Frenchmen in the eighteenth century had termed the "*jactance*," the bombast, of the mulatto. He had an open-air theatre constructed, with searchlights, and gave proletariat ballets to an accompaniment of music by Prokovieff; he himself was present in the blazing sun, wrapped in a sable cape and wearing an astrakhan cap. The wealthy villas at Pétionville were converted into sanatoria, and museums were set up so spacious, but so empty, that an automobile could drive through them. One of them, the M.L.O.F. (Museum of Local Ornithological Fauna) contained nothing but one parrakeet, which kept endlessly repeating the one word, " Horror ! "

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A negro's life is short, and the time now came for Occide to contemplate his end. Had he not been ageing and growing thinner ? On the Lenin Square—formerly Cathedral Square—he built a mausoleum with a red flame as its crest, lit up all night long, as at Moscow. He would have no poor man's tomb, a thing of bricks. His heart knew the old ancestral longing for a round tumulus, adorned with a chamber-pot, a silk hat, and an umbrella. His last resting-place, set in a circle of bamboos and dark cotton-plants, would be a cupola of concrete, deriving its inspiration from the new hotels at Palm Beach, from the mausoleum

of Theodoric, and from those ancient fortresses on the Slave Coast, built with an indestructible mortar composed of blood and gunpowder and brandy.

Sometimes Occide would kill time in the company of his toadies, by designing new instruments of torture ; and then would set off in the twelve-cylinder car presented to the Revolution by Josephine Baker, to see whether his foes had been crucified as he had ordered, mutilated, castrated, or hung head downwards from cocoanut-trees, their legs twisted back on the chest. But his indifference to suffering prevented him from enjoying that very long. He now composed the inscriptions for the future condemned victims—he who could never scoff too bitterly at rhymesters :

*“ Behold, black crimes too dire
E'er to withstand great Occide's ire ! ”*

Farewell, Karl Marx and the exact sciences ! Occide took part by telegram, on the advice of Vercingetorix, in cross-word competitions ; and he sent drawing-room verse to *Les Annales* :

*“ O beauteous birds that wing your way
Ere yet the matins sound the day !
All's well for you t'alight and stand
Upon the adamantine strand—
O beauteous birds ! ”*

And he put a pink lacquer frame round the note of congratulations which he received in reply from “ Cousin Yvonne,” who of course imagined him to be some young Creole lady.

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He gave himself up to good living, and was no longer contented with Congo beans and smoked herrings with stinging sauce ; he craved for exotic delicacies, and received from Havana by aeroplane caviare, *foie gras*, and sparkling wine. His table he entrusted to Paul Bourget, the best *maître d'hôtel* on the island.

* * * * *

All day long now Octobreville is silent, as it used to be only during the siesta. A desert of streets, even when high noon is not prostrating the town. Desolation, in the pause before creation. Nature is a dizzily white page, on which even the impossible may possibly be writ. Nothing remains for Occide but to destroy Haiti, or to make it vanish. And he is fully ready for either. He has read how his ancestors buried the chiefs along with their wives and servants ; and he would like all Haiti to follow him likewise into the grave. His bouts of luxury and sensuality, his fits of opulence, are succeeded like typhoons by immediate depressions. For women he has no more desire. He has no further thought of setting up his six-score bastard children ("outside children," as they are called in Haiti) as prebendaries ; in vain do they cry "Papa !" when he passes—he rebuffs them, with his gold-heeled boots. In any case, he will have no more ; he has taken too many love-philtres of *liane-bandi*, he has indulged too often. He relishes hatred for its own sake—the modern form of enthusiasm. He is seized by a frenzy of mystical poverty, blows up the old sacred trees with dynamite, and blocks up wells : tropical nature is in itself a luxury that now offends him, and he yearns for the Equality of snows. He

hits out wildly, even at poor old women who imagine the old days to be back again, and once more squat in the market beside their little piles of charcoal; he imports mastiffs from Cuba and sets them on the Levantine traders. He orders the execution of two envoys from Comrade Austerlitz, ex-convicts from Saghalen, who made the mistake of starting a traffick in pearls.

What Occide yearns for is a Communism such as Russia will never know, a return to the old Communism of Africa, that of the bare body: a communism of pipes, of women, of fleshpots; a communism of the transparent hut, where a neighbour's every breath is overlooked, his every heart-beat spied upon. The sight of white now acts on him just as red on a bull. Don't the Russians call their enemies "the Whites"? He forbids the use of undyed linen. And then prohibits clothing altogether. The earthly paradise regained!

"A monster in a dream," say the inhabitants of Octobreville, with all the long-suffering indulgence of negroes towards their butchers.

Looking down from the uplands, the prospect gives the measure of Occide's power. Not a single vessel now cuts into the flat expanse of the Caribbean, blue as a blowfly; the shores are ravaged by yellow fever; lighthouses are never lit; to the West, San Domingo has barred her frontier with a sanitary cordon. Only the typewriters of the eighteen thousand officials patter on; but there has been no paper for a month now, so they're empty. Every menace from abroad has disappeared. Daily conspiracies burst one after another like soap-bubbles. Suspect journalists are invited to pay visits—in leper-houses.

Occide sneers as he fans himself, and says: "Play with the monkey if you like, but don't twist his tail!"

Nobody now laughs about him. He has given his name to the largest cemetery in the capital—*Campus Occidi*.

At last, God seems to be protecting the Tsar,

IV

Exactly twelve minutes after noon.

The sea-breeze rose at its appointed hour. Occide was humming a song as he shaved. Swathe after swathe, the soapsuds vanished from his cheeks, and his white face turned black again.

The Postmaster-General broke in precipitately, without having asked an audience. He handed the Dictator a wireless message.

At one o'clock the iron gates of the National Palace swung open, and the official automobiles, with blinds drawn and klaxons screaming, took the road to Cap Haïtien in a whirlwind of dust.

When the citizens of Octobreville ventured forth after the siesta, they saw the lorries of the Public Works Department, and the Agricultural Department's tractors, emerging from the Palace laden with statues, furniture, venetian-glass lustres, silk hangings, wines, furs, pianolas, sweets. Everyone ran with the news.

It was then that the shell burst.

It tore a hole in the barracks and went right through the

billiard-room of the Eldorado before it killed some laundresses in a garden. It was inexplicable. The Haitians know quite well that *coups d'état* come only from the landward side ; but the shell had been fired from the sea, and the sea was empty.

Nevertheless, a couple of hours later, smoke was seen on the horizon. Then funnels. And about five o'clock they could distinguish metallic masts which did not break the purple and orange fantasies of sunset.

"The Americans ! Be off ! Fast as you can !"

And at nightfall the American fleet, with its airplane-catapults and its guns with the bore of sewers, was anchored off Octobreville, back after a year's absence.

* * * * *

Occide had not fled so far as was supposed. To put people on the wrong scent, he had let his cars go off without him ; and instinct, tradition, and bewilderment, drove him to seek refuge in the French Legation. Throughout Haitian history, the legations have always enjoyed the right of asylum, and Occide went in, forgetting that he himself had expelled the diplomats, and that this house of the sister Republic, with its blackened coat-of-arms, was merely a sealed wooden house like all others. Everything, in fact, was closed. And then the bugles of the Yankee Marines rang out. Occide had just time to plunge himself up to the neck in a pool in the garden, filled with dirty tepid water. Rifleshots—but fired in the air ; the citizens of the capital were welcoming their old masters as liberators—the Americans, with their dreadful flag on which the sky is methodically sorted out, and the stars submit to correct alignment like streets !

Patrols were now out hunting for the Dictator, combing the legations. The populace howled at the iron gates. Occide shuddered as he thought of the former President, General Vilbrun-Guillaume, assassinated in this very spot in 1915; stout though he was, they had still managed to push him between bars only eight or nine inches apart. . . . Occide reflected that they would not be long in finding him, for the Americans have a passion for scouring all pools of water and emptying them at once, from their dread of mosquitoes. So he came out of the water as soon as darkness fell, dried himself on banana leaves, and, as before, reached the mountains.

Next day the walls were placarded with this laconic proclamation by the Admiral High Commissioner of the United States :

PRICE ON

OCCIDE'S HEAD—

\$10,000.

The Haitian newspapers reappeared that very day, more prolix than ever. Vercingetorix Médor was appointed President, in spite of the fact that, only a few days earlier, he had had no qualms about currying the Dictator's favour by publishing a page of literary criticism which granted him "a truly prodigious and universal genius, combining the splendours of Rostand with the grace of Lamartine." And Vercingetorix now undertook the drawing-up of the bill of denunciation :

BLACK MAGIC

I, Chief Executive of the Will of the People, Father of Their resolutions, Guardian and Inspirer of Their tendencies: Do hereby order whomsoever may find or discover the ex-citizen-dictator OCCIDE, the man who has planned and achieved the ruin of Society and the most sacred bases, beds, and buttresses of the Haitian Family and Propriety, to bring him to Us, dead or alive, or even unconscious.

And Whereas the said Occide has murdered the best Citizens without their consent, has brought hither spies from foreign parts, and has unlawfully embezzled the State funds, I hereby offer personally, and over and above the reward promised by the High Commissioner, the sum of

1000 GOURDES

for the capture of his head.

Apply to the offices of the "Petit Temps," between 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock, except on Market Days.

Forty-eight hours after this advertisement had appeared, the Americans were brought a body strapped to an ass, swollen up like a leather bottle with the heat, and decomposing fast; the face was already eaten by ants. The corpse was declared to be that of the Dictator. Its sable military coat, a gift from Stalin, was sufficient proof of identity.

Such at least was the opinion of the High Commissioner. . . .

Nevertheless. . . .

* * * * *

THE BLACK TSAR

. . . a few months later the little villa known as “*Ça m’suffit*” at Mazargues, near Marseilles, changed hands. It was bought by a negro with white eyebrows, and skin crinkled like the bark of a butternut tree. Monsieur Toublanc—such was his name—never went out except for some duck-shooting in the Camargue. He was said to be rich, and retired from some kind of small backstairs business.

Port-au-Prince, Dec. 1st.

Palm Beach, Christmas, 1927.

III
AFRICA



GOOD-BYE, NEW YORK !

TO GEORGES AURIC

“ . . . *d'un bijou rose et noir* ”

Baudelaire

I

A DANK Christmas Eve, with a fog that grew denser and chillier as one went down-town towards the Hudson. At the New York piers of the American Atlantic Line the *Mammoth* was straining on her hawsers. With her tonnage of 30,000 she was one of the finest and newest liners of the service, and in winter was withdrawn from the New York to Europe crossing and engaged for cruises into warm regions of the globe intended for millionaires. Through the icy fog, a yellow poster at the gates of Pier 61 attracted the eye like a sun. A Zulu in rotogravure, with a headdress of ostrich plumes, was dancing and brandishing his goatskin shield. The letterpress ran :

“RIGHT ROUND AFRICA !

“ 28,000 Miles in 97 Days !

“The whole of Africa—darkest Africa ! The land of big game . . . the war-path . . . the ebony tribes . . . the Zambesi Falls or the Thundering Smoke . . .

"Visit the haunts of the Arab traffickers in Mozambique . . . The Cape, an everlasting flower-show . . . A glimpse of Kimberley and its diamond-mines . . . Johannesburg and its mountains of powdered quartz . . . The snake-charmers of Port Elizabeth . . . Pretoria—Kruger and his big pipe . . . Bulawayo—Cecil Rhodes on his granite . . . Breathe the clove-scented air of Zanzibar . . . Mombasa, the coral island . . . Kenya, the home of the rhinoceros . . . Remember Nairobi and its veiled women . . . Victoria Nyanza and its airplane service . . . The Mountains of the Moon . . . Uganda and his hippopotami . . . The Nile !

"Travellers all—take your places on the Magic Carpet of the American Atlantic Line. Refinement . . . comfort . . . progress . . . The *Mammoth* is more than just a liner : she is a real club, a club restricted to 200 members—the choicest, most select and most exclusive of all clubs !"

And the *Mammoth* gave her first bellow. In the dusk of midnight water she gleamed with light from all her illuminated portholes, through which one could see the rooms cased in rare woods and draped with soft silks. With her steam up, the liner was beginning to belch oil-fumes from her four funnels, and whilst down below she lit up the water and thrust back the fog, up above her black clouds made the night still darker. . . . She roared a second time, so loud that even the grinding of the windlasses was drowned.

In six minutes the anchor would be raised. A steward came up to the purser, at attention.

"Room 2 on 'A' deck, still nobody here, sir."

GOOD-BYE, NEW YORK!

The purser consulted his plan. There were two suites of special luxury on the upper deck, one already occupied by the family of Senator A. Applejack, of Boston. The other, consisting of a sitting-room, private dining-room, two bathrooms and two bedrooms, was reserved in the name of a Mrs. Louiset, of New York, with companion.

Just as the siren's third blast was reverberating, two women appeared on the scene. Already they were ringing the bell right down into the hold, to clear off all who had only come aboard to say good-bye. The lady reporter of social intelligence for the *New York Times*, who "covered" the liner sailings, approached the foremost of the two passengers, her professional assurance tempered by an exquisite smile.

"I guess you're glad to be going off to Africa in weather like this, Mrs. Louiset?"

The young woman was wrapped in a mink cloak of so dark a sheen that every woman turned green with envy from the instant that she set foot on deck. She opened very red lips in a death-pale face; exotic eyes gleamed behind the short veil that covered the top part of her features.

"Madame Louiset is the name of my French maid. It was she who reserved the cabins."

"May I say that you come from New York?" asked the journalist.

The answer was just going to reach her when the gang-way moved. One second more and it would be in mid-air. The interviewer was caught between duty and the vexation of being borne off to the far countries of the Negroes, or at least as far as the pilot-boat of Staten Island. She fled, while the liner began to throb with the straining of the first

turns of the propellers and the windlass cogs raising the anchors from the river-bed with a stench of rotten eggs.

II

After a couple of days, with Cape Hatteras well astern, the weather grew milder. Loraine Applejack was smoking his pipe on deck, after a dance. All the chairs had been folded up, and the wide beach of wood, thirty feet across, presented a wonderful track for exercise. It was two o'clock in the morning. Behind the frosted glass of cabin windows he had seen the shadows of women contemplating their nudity before getting into bed. Then, all the lights had gone out. And now there was nothing but the sea, a wall alternately rising and sinking. Silence. Just here and there in the flanks of the vessel, as she dozed in the vast snoring of her twin pairs of propellers, a tooth-glass or hairbrush slipped loose and clattered down : that was all.

Loraine Applejack was making the tour of Africa along with his mother and sister, after his last year at Harvard. He was the type of handsome sportsman immortalised by the covers of the *Saturday Evening Post*, formerly captain of the lacrosse team, and editor of the satirical student magazine. He belonged to one of those university families of Massachusetts, puritan and multi-millionaire. Before him stretched a life of Harvard graduate dinners, grouse-shooting, and social work.

The young man heard nothing over the sound of the waves, but he felt that he was being followed. He turned round. He saw a woman he had not yet noticed on board,

GOOD-BYE, NEW YORK!

erect in a sentry-box of fur. A colourless skin, hair almost blue. Doubtless one of those outlandish women, who, in the films, do not hesitate to intrude upon young men, uninvited, in a snowstorm.

They looked at each other. She pleased him.

* * * * *

At lunch next day, when they were abreast of the Bermudas, the Italian head-waiter informed Loraine, with a smile as if he were offering him a special delicacy, that if he came aft that afternoon at five o'clock, he could witness a burial at sea. One of the 'C' deck stewards had died of pleurisy the night before.

At five o'clock Loraine climbed on to the narrow bridge overlooking the stern. In front of him the whole crew, a thousand strong, stood at attention. On the right the white-jacketed stewards were drawn up; on the left, the deck-hands and the firemen, black with refuse, the greasers, smeared with oil; facing him were the nurses, and stewardesses, and the French cooks, with black pointed beards, and their napkins round their necks. Finally, the corpse, outstretched on a board, under a flag. A surpliced priest, in a group of the captain and his officers, was praying.

A lilac-pink sun was sinking into fog. The liner rolled, and slowly recovered herself each time. The officers saluted stiffly. . . Then the priest looked up from his prayer-book and made a sign of benediction. . . . It was as methodical as an execution; the American flag covering the dead man's head was stripped off. Six men tipped up the see-saw plank. And Lorraine saw the mummy, roped in its sail-cloth, slide noiselessly down feet foremost, and vanish

into the wide, foaming wake left by the propellers. A wreath bobbed up and down.

Loraine turned round. The woman of the night before was there, alone, beside him. He saw in her eyes that she was holding herself in, to keep herself from howling aloud like a dog.

"I hate death," she said.

* * * * *

"I guess you have enough of your ice water, seeing you're a son of a good family and a dry country? Would you like a drink of something better? I was never very fond of water at any time, but when I think of our friend of this afternoon, sewn up in his canvas and now down there at the bottom. . . ."

It was always about one or two in the morning that the unknown came out for her stroll on deck. Loraine knew it now, for he spied her, the puritan young wolf that he was, with shamefaced ardour. She had just spoken to him. On the side-table of the dining-room there were several bottles of champagne on the ice.

"May I ask your name?"

"My name is Pamela Freedman. Call me Pam."

Straddle-legged on the carpet, on account of the roll, Loraine could see dolls, jewel-cases, ginger biscuits, Mencken's *American Mercury*, the latest book of the Sitwell brothers, Gide's *Faux-Monnayeurs*. . . .

"Do you read much?"

"I don't care for society."

. . . "much French?"

"Yes, I've lived in Paris a long while. I adore French

literature, it's so swift, and synthetic, and accommodating. These people have such broad ideas. . . . At home, we see things in a big way, but we often think in a very small way . . ."

"Are you an American?"

"Of course, just as much as you, Mr. Applejack. Don't I look it?"

"Oh, don't be angry!"

"You're rather stupid."

"Why did you invite me in to drink, then?"

"Because you're the handsomest man in this ship."

III

The purser of the *Mammoth* was a brilliant officer. He did not hold himself exactly upright, but slightly raked back like one of the funnels. He had much gold braid, and was plastered with as many decorations and medals as a swimming champion.

He was throwing dice for his apéritif with his friend Mr. H. Nathan Jonas, retired banker, who left Riverside Drive every winter for an Atlantic Line cruise in order to make social connections. "A member of the Alpine Club," they said of him, so eager was he to scale the icy peaks of society. Mr. Jonas was quite at home in the *Mammoth*, like his ancestor in the whale and with the purser he was the life and soul of the crowd on board. He had no rival in guessing the number of miles run during the day, in knocking down the hen at auction without removing his cigar from his lips, or in persuading a fat cheque into the charity-draws by an amusing remark.

"If I win this throw?"

"Well, double or quits," answered the purser.

"No, a friendly one."

"Right you are."

"I mean—a friendly question . . ."

Jonas won.

"And now, what is it?" asked the officer. "I know what you're going to ask me . . . To introduce you to the mysterious lady on 'A' deck. Well, she's invisible. And besides, she doesn't want to know anybody."

"Well, show me her form in the passengers' roll, at least. Just for a second . . . I've got a wager about it . . ."

In the purser's cabin Jonas put on his glasses and read:

Mrs. Pamela Freedman Orfei.

"See here . . . pardon me, Mr. Purser, it's no business of mine to teach you your job, but you can see for yourself that everything isn't filled up on this form as it ought to be."

"How's that, eh?"

"Well, see here: under the heading *Race* printed here, where this little lady ought to have filled in by adding *White*, there's nothing written."

"An oversight . . ."

"Ah, ha! Do you believe in oversights, you old shark? If you were asked to declare in writing what your race is, would you just forget you were white? Let's see her passport, eh?"

"My dear sir," the purser objected quite seriously, "that's not in our bond. I promised you a sight of this form: and one point is all."

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"Where was she born? New York?"

"No, Atlanta, Georgia."

"I was sure of it," exclaimed Jonas. "I think I'll soon be able to tell you who your Mrs. Freedman really is . . ."

III

Heat. The first day of white trousers. Nathan Jonas was showing off before the ladies.

"I ought to tell you right now, ladies, that I have two talents. I can tell people's ages simply by looking in their eyes. . . . But that's a gift I don't really boast about."

"And your second parlour-trick?"

"Well, I have an extraordinary flair for detecting half-castes. I can spot them a mile away. . . . The descendants of cross-breeding have a suppleness of body and a flexibility of mind which are never found in persons of pure blood."

"Now, give us your revelations. . . ."

The elderly respectable ladies came nearer, agleam with scandal and jewellery.

"The very night that we left New York, when I saw Mrs. Freedman come forward just as the gangway was going to be raised, I felt that she had something more than white blood. . . . I made certain inquiries and I can tell you for certain that this so-called New-Yorker is no such thing: she was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and . . . she's got negro blood!"

A torpedo in the engine room would not have startled these ladies more.

"Abominable!" said Mrs. Cornelius de Witt.

It was incredible. A passenger on the cruise, the

occupant of the best stateroom *de luxe*—with black blood !
What an age we live in !

"The *Mammoth* is not the *Mayflower*," Mr. Jonas indulgently replied.

"Sure ! It's a slave-ship !"

"When we pay a fare of ten thousand dollars, we surely have the right to insist on being amongst Whites !"

"Come, come," tittered Mr. Jonas. "You're paying your ten thousand dollars to go and see niggers, and you complain, ladies, just because they show you one before the appointed date ?"

"And who is your negress ?"

"The young lady's full name is Freedman-Orfei. I knew her mother, twenty years ago . . . at least. (I'm speaking of a prehistoric age when men still turned up the collars of their overcoats so as not to be seen visiting a negress). She was a quadroon named Freedman, as so many of the old liberated slaves called themselves. When her luck had been made, she married an Italian tenor named Orfei, and afterwards they both went to live in Paris. Our fellow-passenger has taken this name, but she was the daughter of an earlier union . . ."

"And whence the money, the emeralds, the mink cloak, all the style ?"

"From the mother. . . . She used to provide entertainment for a good many of us in those days, and then she set up a beauty parlour for coloured women in Harlem. And round about 1907 or 1908, I've been told, she invented an apparatus for taking the kink out of negroes' hair. You know what an endless penance it is for a Black to have only that froth on their heads ! Flat hair meant emancipation !

GOOD-BYE, NEW YORK!

As for the skin, they rightly thought that things can always be fixed somehow! Well, when Mrs. Freedman died in Paris shortly after the war, I read in the papers that she'd left a hundred million dollars. Her daughter is travelling no doubt to forget . . . her colour. But with a fortune like that, one is no longer a nigger!

The ladies' excitement was succeeded by consternation. Now that his bolt had been hurled, Mr. Nathan Jonas showed a touch of that softness which the Jews always keep in reserve for the disinherited.

"Bah!" he commented. "And after all what would happen if the Blacks did contrive to be white?"

"Aren't white women doing all they can nowadays to be black?" said Mrs. Cornelius de Witt.

"But seriously," continued Jonas pleasantly, "our age is a Negro age. Just think of the general slackness, the distaste of the young for hard work, the nudity on the Lido or Palm Beach, equality, fraternity, clay houses that last three years, public love-making, divorce, publicity . . ."

The old ladies joined in:

"The era of fetish dolls and fifty-hour dancing competitions!"

"The age of crude colours, cubism, geometrical stuffs . . ."

" . . . feathers on the head . . ."

" . . . and ivory bracelets . . . and Harlem . . ."

" . . . and syncopated music . . ."

"Exactly! I don't need to tell you," Jonas concluded. "The charlatans, the verbose orators, the fortune-tellers, the Frotti-Frotta, the fake jewellery . . ."

"In fact, the negro is just our shadow!"

V

"Pamela, do you know a Mr. Nathan Jonas?" Loraine Appleyard asked his new friend, Mrs. Freedman.

"Never heard of him. Why?"

"Because he's going round the ship telling everybody you've got black blood."

In a flash Pamela had a vision of her childhood, her mother's shop, and then her young days, and their departure for Paris, their sudden luxury, a whole fairyland of pleasures where social prejudices, with the other inconveniences, had utterly vanished. She remembered her return to America after Mrs. Freeman's death, and how she, herself a different Pamela, free, emancipated, and polished by France, had dared to live on Fifth Avenue, entertaining intellectuals, Whites of the new school of ideas . . . Her love-affairs, her successes. . . . And here was luck pitching her back, shamefaced and helpless, amongst the incurables!

Never was there such a silence.

Erect in her pale pink gown, flashing with diamonds, Pamela drew herself stiffly back, and then flung herself into the young man's arms.

"Loraine! My darling! The dirty skunk!"

"I smashed two of his teeth in the bar," added Loraine calmly.

"My father came from Atlanta, but a white, white as yourself," she said through her sobs. "And my mother was Cuban. I swear to you, I've got White blood in my veins. Just look at me."

He looked at nothing. He clasped her tight in his arms. That grey skin, so soft that lips resting on it seemed to be

pressing into a void, those green, blazing eyes, those greedy lips, that snake-like body—everything that ought to have shown up the lie was exactly what blinded him to it. . . .

VI

The Tropics. Cabins were becoming untenable. One morning Pamela appeared on deck at lunch-time. Her beauty, explosive as a bomb, took the enemy by surprise. Summer dresses that were almost ballroom gowns, jewels from the wrist up to the elbow; and one day brought its breeches for riding the electric horse in the mechanical therapeutics apparatus, the next a costume for the swimming pool. A round-robin was in circulation. The captain was approached, and presented with a protest against the presence of a coloured woman on board. He was evasive, but promised to forward it to the Company; meanwhile, however, once Mrs. Freedman was on board, she was entitled to her ninety-seven days' passage, though she were blacker than the whole of Harlem. Not to offer her salutations? She'd have to begin by asking for them. Put her in quarantine? She associated with nobody, except Loraine.

It was through him that they strove to reach her. "It's only an error in taste, to occupy the finest suite in the *Mammoth*, and to show yourself in clothes like that, when you've reason not to be proud of your skin. But to snatch the best-looking boy on the ship, and the most eligible as well—that's too much of a good thing!" thought the vulgar.

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On the night before their first landing in Africa, about twelve, the young American went up to his friend's cabin. Just as he was going to knock he caught sight of a paper pinned to her door, on which an anonymous hand had written a scriptural text: "Woe unto him who causeth scandal." His face reddened, he saw himself blackballed at clubs, and he had visions of his father, Senator Appleyard, losing his seat through his folly; he went back to his room. There he wrote an embarrassed letter to Mrs. Freedman, saying that he could not land with her, as he had promised, at this first port of call because he would have to accompany his mother and sister. Having offered this satisfaction to the blond races, he fell asleep thinking of the women he would soon be seeing, black and naked.

VII

First port of call. Pamela Freedman, like the other passengers, was slung out over the void, in a basket which deposited her very delicately in the bottom of a long canoe. She found herself alone, seated on a straw cushion with her feet in the water, confronted by some naked men who were singing with a hoarse melancholy; the boat pushed up her nose, leapt over the swell of the bar, and subsided again on to the calm water. It was only eight in the morning, but already the glare burned one's eyes. A dazzling mist lay on the quicksilver sea. The *Mammoth*, besieged by canoes, was still vomiting forth her passengers to starboard, whilst on the port side assailed by heavier pinnaces and scows, she was swallowing drinking-water and fruit. The American girl looked at the men, their bodies gleaming with sweat,

their mouths flashing white. All teeth, all sex : limitless in all that pertained to feeding themselves and reproducing themselves. . . . She was surprised when she heard them talking in charming French in tiny, childlike voices. Was there a French Africa, then ? They held out a large fish to her, tinted like those in an aquarium. They were redolent of strength and happiness ; the silky hardness of their bare skins, the freedom of their uncovered limbs, the amazing suppleness of their loins, the red leather amulets hanging round their necks—everything struck Pamela at first with its novelty, then with its harmony and beauty. Being alone, she could dare to remember that this blood ran in her own veins.

The daily bulletin, printed on board and slipped under the cabin-doors every morning, announced that passengers could go ashore from eight o'clock in the morning and re-embark at ten in the evening. Pamela was delighted ; she was going to spend long hours on land after all these days of crossing, these past hours when she had wept with rage . . . wherever she turned her eyes she saw nothing but a grey lagoon fringed with cocoanut palms, cabin-dwellings covered with a ruddy clay like the hair of orang-outangs, a few warehouses, customs-buildings, sheds. What port was this ? It was neither an administrative capital nor a big trading centre ; the place had been chosen—and well chosen—to give the passengers of the cruise a first impression of savage Africa in the shortest possible time : in a few hours New York could photograph lagoons, strand and jungle.

Africa, silted estuaries, moving deltas, a succession of ever-rising terraces, said the guide-books. . . . After a

barrier of mangroves and grey-blue reefs like slag, one reached a stretch of sand redder than the sand of urine. And then the sun hoisted a blinding disc, shorn of its rays, almost polar ; it struck down so vertically that there were now no shadows to anything ; the colour of things was eaten up, their relief obliterated. Pamela sank into the hot air. Two men offered themselves, joined by a hammock of pineapple fibre. She let herself be parcelled up.

"To the virgin forest !" she said joyfully, as if she were giving an address on Lexington Avenue.

* * * * *

Having crossed a narrow savannah, Pamela and her bearers reached a dark line of wall, its ridge serrated against the sky : it was a planting of palms. To believe in it she had to keep saying to herself : "This is Africa : this is the great forest at last !"

She felt none of that overwhelming sense which so many books had foretold for her ; nevertheless, everything seemed confused, absurd, with neither form nor colour. It was neither the bottom of the sea, nor a cathedral, nor any other of those images which authors use to describe tropical forests, but a green fortification rising from a base of water. The hammock slipped through the chink of a footpath. It was like being underneath the stands of a motor-track : darkness, with splashes of sun between the thousands of joists. Every tree sought to rob its neighbour of its light ; they climbed ; the cords of liana swung down. Pamela threw back her head to have a better view of the branches bending under the weight of parasites sliding off them like bunches of vermicelli.

"Further on !"

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Riding between the shoulders of these men she felt again the familiar rise and fall of the liner. She played the explorer, with her lovely helmet, her sports dress from Abercrombie's, her big smoked-glass spectacles : when she took these off, there was a magical spell of colours. And then what restfulness after the crowds of America ! Where were all the inhabitants of this immense Africa ? Not a sound. Not a bird. The world seemed hardly to have begun. And villages ? Roads ? Motor-cars ? They had been walking for an hour, but Pamela had met nobody. Leaning out from her litter, she saw nothing but swelling earth, tree-trunks, branches, leaves, hibiscus flowers stretching towards her like mouths. She was seized by a wild desire to play, a childish longing to run.

The forest grew denser still ; it was now becoming a tunnel, a sewer ; water was welling up unseen, penetrating everywhere. The raised footpath switchbacked along a wavy causeway, as if at Coney Island. The tangle of roots, the profusion of twining lianas, the straddling of parasites, seemed all inextricable. Everything was green ; not a single joining tone, yellow or white, not one smooth surface to rest one's eyes upon, not a thing that was not twisted, deformed, tortured, irrational. From the purulent pools she felt herself watched by motionless crocodiles and water-monsters. She marvelled at the shivered trees, striped like lizards, with their heads thrust down into the slime, plunged despairingly in this greenish jelly, or murdered by their neighbours in the depths of this sinister hostelry.

" Further on ! " she cried.

* * * * *

Pamela had lingered watching the setting sun, multi-coloured as some bird of the Indies. She was surprised to see the darkness well up so quickly. . . . And now it was a question of not missing the boat. The bearers quickened their pace. After two hours, worn-out, they emerged into open country. The cool dampness from the sea refreshed them after the stifling dankness of the undergrowth. Clouds of cyclamen passed slowly over, bearing wavy flashes of summer-lightning. Between the cocoanut-palms the sky was visible with its green stars. . . . At last, the sea. . . . Immediately Pamela looked out for the luminous mass of the *Mammoth*. . . . Was some bump of land hiding the ship? She strained her eyes. . . . Nothing. . . . Could it be that all the lights were out? The ocean lay there, unpeopled, calm in the offing, effervescent along the beach. Anxiously she made sure of the time: it was only nine o'clock, after all. . . . At last the hammock reached the pier.

"To the ship!"

"Ship, no ship, Ma'am."

"What's that?"

"Big ship gone. Gone this mo'ning, gone ten o'clock, you ship gone, wit'out you, Ma'am."

Gone! Here she was alone, at night, on the soil of Africa! The *Mammoth* was no longer there. There was no chance of rejoining her: her next call was at the Cape, a fortnight from here. This was the end of the cruise! Pamela leaned against one of the stanchions cemented into the pier. She wept tears of rage and despair. Flying foxes brushed her. What absurd mistake had . . . Alone, alone! Without trunks, without her maid, without

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money. A few Blacks had squatted round her feet, waiting, their arms hanging loose between their open legs. "I must *do* something," she said to herself; but she felt that it was useless. A certain languor tied her to the soil, merged her with the air. What about wireless? They didn't know what that was. . . . A cargo destined for Marseilles . . . when? To-morrow?

"Yes."

"In six months?"

"Yes, yes."

You couldn't get anything definite out of these negroes: they answered yes to everything, just to be pleasant.

And now a breeze was springing up, a warm breath that froze her. Where was she to await the day? The bearers had fallen asleep, coiled together like a nest of serpents. Pamela remembered noticing on her expedition a brick and tin house with a flag-staff, not very far away.

"Is it to the right?"

"Yes."

"To the left?"

"Yes."

"Come along then."

They made a negative gesture. They never sally out at night because of the spirits of suicides who devour your soul. She'd have to go alone.

* * * * *

An hour later she was still walking in the darkness, having found nothing. The deserted road, silent and light as cork, twisted, lingered, and then plunged again into the forest.

In the silence she heard nothing, but one invisible bird, always the same one, posted high up on the look-out, which gave abrupt authoritative whistles like those of policemen. Night brought the lightning nearer. The sky clouded over in an instant, and a dry tornado bent the trees over and brought with it a variety of smells so vague that they were cruel, smells of battlefields, of Catholic churches, of pharmacies. Pamela only knew the frail Occidental nights which can be routed by a turn of the switch: not this heavy viscous thing through which you had to smash your way. The darkness was torn by the sexual, harassing, metallic clamour of the crickets.

Why this succession of hot waves and cold? Why go on walking? It was the hour when a human being was out of the question. There was no need for anyone to go anywhere; nor to go back either. No reason to breathe, to exist, to be called Pamela Freedman.

One after another came the flashes, fifteen or twenty to the minute, dilating the circle of her horizon, heightening the tension of her nerves and the strain on her peering eyes. One moment, in her exhaustion she was stumbling over the ghosts of cyclone-riven trees; the next, into grass taller than herself; under the electric flashes the grass looked white, and everything, even to the trunks of the palms, was white and polar, except for the red Gothic chapels of the antheps. Monstrous stumps of charred, blasted trees rose up like calcined thigh-bones and tibias. Suddenly Pamela stopped dead At last! Fires . . . men! She hurried on, putting to rout the invisible beings in the thickets, and red and green phosphorescent larvae that sprinkled her with musky sperm. . . . Large grey birds

with silent cloth wings, rose at her feet. She ran. . . . The glow on the horizon came nearer. . . . It must be a big village, a town perhaps, where you could eat and drink, a real town with electric signs. . . . How could she possibly have been happy that morning, lost in that rotting immensity? The nearer she came to the fire and men, the more did she feel herself inherently at one with all progress, cheered by the notion of her investments, daughter of a great country where nature is no longer dangerous, where animals are caged, where peril and death are tamed. Her round, mobile nostrils took in the kindly smoke from the wood. The zone of light was now spreading so wide that it seemed like a dawn wedded to the curves of the soil and climbing along them, faithfully following up-hill and down-dale without a break. For a moment Pamela imagined an army bivouacking. . . . More scrub, then a few trees, now the heat became intense. . . . And finally she was held up by the first low ruddy flames browsing along the rich mould, nibbling at it like paper. . . . Beyond was the blackness of the consumed soil, with smears of linen-white ash; and from further back still there came the reserve force of the great flames, or rather waves, ten or twelve feet high, of a relentless red that only darkened at their crests. Hand in hand they were moving forward, here and there throwing out blazing sparks, in one long line as far as the eye could reach. . . . A desert of fire. Nobody. . . . Pamela cried out: there was no answer save the crackling of this marching furnace. . . . Unaided, and unopposed by any obstacle—the animals had fled—the brasier gorged itself in its solitude. Overhead the trees were blazing erect, despite the sap that came spurting out, and boiling, despite their

hundred and twenty feet of height, despite the dampness of the leaves ; trunks exploded, stuffed with sparks. Some palms, more easily brought down, had fallen ; they were already blackened, and were smoking like bad cigars full of saltpetre. Pamela had shouted till her voice was gone, and at last she realised that she was alone, all alone with this fire that sparkled so merrily in the void of the night. . . . It went slowly on, taking its time, as if to chew everything on its path very thoroughly, greedy as a pyre : and Pamela had to retreat.

Flashes came in succession, silent, long and soft, like those of magnesium. A crash of thunder : rain at last ! And the sky seemed now to be squatting with legs apart, emptying the belly of its clouds with peals of thunder and delight. . . .

A little later, breathless and running with sweat, the American stood still in a glade. Her flimsy dress was in rags, her ears were singing, her temples drumming. The rising moon, veiled by the dampness of an oily halo, was looking down on her with her nigger laugh. . . . An evil peacefulness, as if those trees had been made only to choke her. She found herself surrounded by a dozen enormous conical straw hats . . . huts ! No light. She called out : no answer. She miaowed, in her cracked voice. The village seemed deserted. Pamela approached one hut at random, determined to share it with the cattle if need be, but in any case to await the day there. A circular roof of dry palms, prolonged by branches, sloped right down to the ground, leaving no opening. She went carefully round it, and at last found a doorway blocked by a mat. She slipped inside on all fours.

An acrid wood-smoke caught her eyes and throat. Some charcoal in a little pit between three stones, was glowing red. The interior of this round hut became gradually visible, and seemed to be empty. From outside Pamela would not have thought it so spacious. . . . She found in it two petrol-cans and a sooty calabash, with some remains of rice. She scraped it up greedily with the help of a wooden spoon. . . . She was now growing used to the darkness, and could distinguish the frame of a bed made of interwoven twigs ; she let herself sink on to it.

Then she saw opposite her, pressed erect and motionless against the wall, more abandoned than a goat, a negro boy. He was watching her with stupid indifference.

VIII

“The brutes ! The savages ! Look, monsieur . . .”

Pamela was seated at table alone, facing a European in khaki uniform with silver buttons. He was local administrator, a Corsican with an upturned moustache, a dark, handsome fellow of the N.C.O. type. The American handed him the daily bulletin prepared in the *Mammoth's* printing-shop.

“Look for yourself ! It reads : ‘Duration of landing—8 a.m. to 10 p.m. Passengers are warned that no delay—’ and so on. Well, now, look here, monsieur . . .” (She made him look through the paper, holding it up to the light.) “Don’t you see that the paper is thinner after the second figure ? Well, it’s been scratched, yes, intentionally scratched : an *a* has been changed into a *p* ; 10 a.m. has

been altered to 10 p.m. And the whole thing to make me miss the boat ! ”

“ A nice trick ! ”

“ Yes, indeed ! ”

Pamela saw again the anonymous paper pinned on to her cabin-door one morning ; it ought to have warned her, after all, of plans being afoot concerning her.

“ Hypocrites ! ” she sobbed.

A five-hundred ton cargo-boat bound for Dakar, in three weeks’ time—that was all the administrator had now to offer her. She stamped her foot.

“ What ! No ice ? No tennis ? No gramophone records ? And you can live like that ? ”

With gallantry he advised her to bear her misfortunes with patience (she wiped her tears . . .), to mess together nicely. . . .

Evening on the terrace, after dinner. Sticky apéritifs. Tepid water. Constellations. Crickets. The horizon rimmed with bush fires. Pamela has forgotten the *Mammoth*, her suite with its rare woods, full of dresses, jewellery and bottles ; she has forgotten all those mischief-makers now far away, swinging between dark water and dark sky. Already she has almost ceased to think of Loraine. Her atavistic shortness of memory and the ardour for life that runs in her blood, are hastening to her help. There is only wounded pride left in her heart, and *sotto voce* she repeats to herself the shipboard conversations as she imagines them away under the Equator : “ It seems that a Mrs. Freedman was left ashore yesterday ? . . . ” “ How very unpleasant for her ! ”—“ Forgotten ! Lost, my dear ! ”—“ And in a

French colony, into the bargain!"—"Oh yes, they're saying all that, but when backs are turned they admit the truth to each other: 'Well, we got the nigger woman ashore all right, huh?'"

She looks round at the bare walls with panther skins nailed to them, at the mats, the panoply of assegais, the trunks propped up on bricks because of the ants, and at the boy, who waits when there are guests with his shirt floating out over his trousers. . . . This simple life, with a man whom yesterday she did not know, seems perfectly natural to her.

The administrator comes over to the American; his air of coaxing is respectful, but beneath this homage she feels him male and a king, a king in accordance with the custom of the black country. He puts a free-and-easy hand on Pamela's bare arm.

"I've been here for two years . . . not much fun, you know. . . . It isn't every day that a woman without a ring falls out of the sky for you—a real white woman too . . ."

* * * * *

Siesta. Silence of the village; dramatic sunlight; the very birds have stopped singing; nothing to be heard but the water from the filter dripping into the demijohn, and a servant's bare feet on the matting. Outside, the law-court, the school and the dispensary are all frying.

For a month now Pamela has been living in the wilds with this Corsican. She has let one cargo-boat sail for Dakar, and then another. She presides at his table. She follows him when he goes shooting, and when he makes his tax-gathering rounds. She has pawned her emeralds with the

Levantines, and has no further thought of going home. She is happy in the midst of these forest-folk, these hunters and raw colonists, in the crazy stage-setting of the great forest. Never has she felt so light or so free. She rears wild cats, gives orders to the troopers, who call her: "Madame Commandant." Failing a bathroom, she washes in a canoe. She presides over dinners with more bottles than guests, dinners where the guests are the school-mistress, the Russian chemist, and the post-master, who brings his gramophone. They mix garlic salads, make naughty remarks to the ladies, and drink sparkling wines with much punning.

In this foreign legion Pamela was made welcome like a waif. They could not understand that anybody "with means" should come to Africa. But she went fishing and hunting, living as if on a ranch, like a school-girl in a holiday-camp in the Rockies. If she had not lost the *Mammoth*, would she be here? Wouldn't she have missed the most amazing adventure of her life? Home-sickness? She guessed it would be in New York that she'd feel homesick now.

During one of those interminable meals, one of those regalements instigated by solitude and the Tropics, Pamela felt herself being watched. She raised her head. No, none of the guests was paying attention to her. They were talking of trade and telling stories about the palms, their flushed faces and the unbuttoned necks of their tunics lit up by the electric lamp reflectors. Bats fluttered about the room. Over their heads, like a paddle of striped canvas, the punkah gently stirred a mild, rhythmic breeze. Mechanically Pamela looked at the ceiling where the pulley was, and

then followed the punkah-cord with her eye till it came down to the open bay in the dark corridor. And there she saw two white points fixing her. In the darkness she distinguished a human being, a naked negro lying on the ground. He had attached the cord to his foot and was fanning the table by moving one leg. He was soft as a wild creature at rest, with flaming eyes—dozing, but ready to start up; and she saw the graceful, wearied gesture, with which he lazily drew the cord towards him, then loosed it, then took it up again. Behind these blatant Europeans, he had an air of lordly and cruel contempt in his sombre immobility that was pleasing to her. Never had she seen anyone so savage, or so beautiful.

Poison and antidotes succeeded each other.

“*Crème de cacao* or *mandarinette*?”

“Quinine or stovarsol?”

“How long have you had that fellow for your punkah?” she asked the master of the house.

“Since this morning. He’s a prisoner, of course, like all our servants. Mixed up in some trouble about witchcraft. . . . Son of a chief in this region. . . . rather a bad lot. . . . I think he’s a fetish-man. Shall we have our coffee in the drawing-room?”

As they rose from table Pamela approached the negro. The full light of the lamp now fell on him, but he was so terribly black that the light was quenched on his skin; he retained just a few gleams on his perfect legs and broad shoulders. His features were lost in the shadows, save for the triangular eyes. Crosses stood out in relief on either cheek. An extraordinary and inborn strength pervaded his

figure. Pamela stepped in front of him and put a five-franc note in his hand ; he took it without a sign of light on his face. He proffered no thanks. He was like a hardwood fetish polished by the fondling of the devout ; he was enthroned now over the deserted banquet, like the very image of Africa. Avidly he was gazing at the table.

“ What is it you want ? ”

He was staring bestially at the salt. With a laugh Pamela handed him the salt-cellar : he swallowed the stuff at one gulp.

IX

Formerly Pamela had the habit of talking like the others about “ these horrible Blacks.” But now she admired those pink mouths, those slender bodies, perfectly erect, the ardent and pure curve of the loins, the waxed skin, the grace of their walk, the motionless torso above the slow, proud stepping of the legs. She envied the blood of such strength that neither the poisonous bites of wild beasts, nor the terrible African diseases could spoil it. What a difference from the American Negroes with their hideous half-colours, their teeth rotten beneath the gold, their flabby bellies, and all the tares of cross-breeding. For these African ancestors the lack of needs was the most splendid ornament ; they were ennobled by poverty ; the more they worked with their hands, the more beautiful they were. They laughed as they toiled, and all their efforts were converted into a song or a dance. They could come in silently at night, and used to lie rolled up at her door on the matting, clasping their women in an embrace that was not freed till morning ; on certain days they smeared themselves with ochre or white colourings, with pounded soil,

GOOD-BYE, NEW YORK!

with sap, and then would work themselves into a frenzy with noise, beating upon inanimate objects until they sang.

And now when dinner was over, Pamela used to go off alone into the woods, to hunt, with an electric lamp on her hat. Mamadu the punkah-man followed her, with the Commandant's carbine and sometimes the gramophone. The American girl put on the records and amused herself with watching her solitude gradually becoming peopled with all the Blacks from round about, wandering or half-wakened, attracted by the music. It amused her to observe that they did not like what the New York Jew composers call Negro melodies; they seemed to prefer the great wild, popular airs of the Russians. She was surrounded by their squatting figures. Sleepwalkers lured hither by harmony; the ivory armlets were the only things that emerged from the shadows. Mamadu said nothing, strong in his prestige as a prisoner, proud of his power; he ruled this silence, ruled the night. Sometimes Pamela bathed by moonlight in a silver-paper river; the Black thrashed the water with a bamboo and shouted to scare away the crocodiles. He stared at this woman in stupefaction, like a negro at his first sight of snow. . . .

One night when they had gone a very long way, with Mamadu behind her carrying round his waist a girdle of guinea-fowls hanging head downward, they heard the dull hammering of a tom-tom.

"That is my village," he said. "Come!"

"It's late. . . ."

"Come."

"We're so far away . . ."

"Give me your gun. Every man needs a woman and a gun . . ."

He slung Pamela round his neck like an antelope, and carried her off.

They went on in this way as far as a village enclosed with hurdles, its narrow lanes so tortuous that they had to wander a long time as in a maze before they reached the actual centre of the noise. Repeatedly they thought they had reached it, but every time a projection barred the way, a twist concealed yet another wrong turning ; high mats fixed down with stakes let through a glimmer of light ; and then they stepped into an enclosed space and entered an outer courtyard where a crowd of sheep could just be made out. Then another strip of shadow and a second enclosure. Suddenly they received the full shock of the tom-tom din. In front of them the orchestra was crucifying silence, the drum-players erect, the balafo-players squatting. At the sight of their entry, everything crashed loud. Mamadu brought forward a lantern and placed it on the ground ; its low gleam lit up the black legs, the vertical stripes of cotton drawers, the heavy brass anklets of the women. . . . The music quickened, and the whole village arrived. Already the most excited were hurling themselves into the dance as into a brasier. Their gesticulating shadows could be seen cut out against the white substructure of the huts, their arms flung out, their joints loosened, their heads bobbing like piston-heads. Dust. Stars. The loins of the women quivered, shaken more than by a fever, stirred by unending shudders. They crowded close, as round a hippopotamus slain by the hunters. The young fetish-man was surrounded and the young girls with their silver girdles shouted their

delight at seeing him returned. The notables clapped their hands. Children rolled about in the courtyard; the lanes were chock-a-block with people. Some inquisitive ones had clambered on to the bending roofs and stood out sharply against the green darkness. Others stood close-pressed against the walls, flattened like bas-reliefs.

No longer was Pamela Freedman the white woman for whom a show is being staged. Nobody heeded her. Eyes were fixed elsewhere. For now Mamadu son of the chief, was dancing: he had the direct gaze, the nobility of carriage of the great Senegalese antelope which is called the "unctuous antelope"; he cast down his limbs like offerings, gathered them together again, and scattered them once more; he had seized his balafo with its uneven strips by a string between his teeth, and pivoting on an invisible axis he made it whirl out over their heads. Pamela could not take her eyes off his face which, the dizzier it became with its whirling, became wild and contented like the face of a god. He danced, and it scooped a hole in the earth. Pamela remembered how he had told her: "Come, I am rich; rain does not come into my hut; my wives are fat and well-fed. . . ." And she had come. . . . She would teach him melancholy and alcohol, and the kisses and other ways of the Whites. . . . The black naked women thronging behind her were hemming her in, lifting her up. The flabby breasts of the old women were flattened against her; the hard ones of the young girls drove into her flesh. The fearful musky smell of the Negroes was overwhelming her, but she could not withhold it from her nostrils. She felt herself entering into a black world; she was drowning in it. Ritually, the moon had risen. The steep at the end of the

open space had turned blue, and the walls likewise. Pamela remembered Irving Berlin's latest success :

" Niggers are only really niggers in the moonlight. . . . "

In that dull thudding of the tom-toms she felt once more the same numbness, the same ecstasy, that she sought in Montmartre jazz at the hour of the full blast of intoxication. . . . She was sick of being a fake White ! Why should she take pride in a progress borrowed from others ? Her own progress was a return, in astounding harmonious union, to the land of her ancestors. . . . O the femaleness, the vast maternity of this continent ! The Negro women are the queens of the black world. She tore off her dress and her necklaces, flung her carbine and cartridges on the ground, scattered her money broadcast, leaving the crowd to grovel in its greed in the dust. Mamadu pressed her bare body against his bare chest, rubbing it against his soft skin with its long ribbed scars which intensified the pleasure with their friction. No, the sight of a white woman did not drive him mad, as the Virginian lynchiers claim ; he took Pamela as he took any other ; he had the black man's enormous and indifferent appetite for women, where quantity is all that matters. Swallowed up in the magic circle, she yielded to him, to this dark throng, amid shouts, the explosions of drums and trading-guns, the clash of iron castanets. Good-bye, New York ! Pamela Freedman was going back into the womb of Africa. No longer was she worth three million dollars : she was worth three oxen, like the other women. There she was, clapping palm to palm, bent double at every cadence, her feet together and legs tight pressed, her loins held stiff, like all the negro women. She was one of them now.



NOVAB THE SON OF KAHADUR

THE PEOPLE OF THE SHOOTING STARS

Dying to rise again . . .
The Russians.

I

THE motor truck stopped. The Levantines took off their helmets. Since eight o'clock they had been tugging their merchandise behind them. There they had sat on the narrow driving-seat, their feet grilled, their backs splitting, holding their heads down to avoid hitting the roof, riding on and on under their canvas hood, seeing nothing of the tropical forest but tree-trunks and the buttresses of haphazard roots writhing out of the soil, red as lumps of flesh. There were two of them, Bishara and Malek, with a black chauffeur. While the last filled up the parched steaming radiator, the two Levantines went forward and Bishara pointed out to his clerk a blue hollow where a few filaments of smoke floated motionless in the still air. It was unexpected, but one could breathe, one could see one's way. The forest had spared this valley. Ever since disembarking on the coast, Malek had seen nothing of the sky but narrow strips above the gaps cut in the foliage. The slope running down from where they stood had only one palm-grove planted in it, and that was well spaced-out; and beyond it was a real plain, where one could distinguish huts amid the cultivation. Then the forest began again; shutting in the horizon like a cliff.

"That is Krou, over there : it's still in the Ivory Coast on French territory," said Bishara. "Further over, it's Liberia. But the frontier's not very well marked. Anyway, you're home."

That was only a phrase. A Levantine trader has no home but his trade. When once he has found his way into the colony, thanks to the precautions of an older relative, he sticks there till he has made a few pence so that he can go further up-country and open a warehouse of his own. Even so with Bishara. He had been posted at Danane with the help of an old hand, had lived there alone for two years in native fashion, eating yams and sleeping on the ground, and had struck lucky in the kola-nut trade. He in his turn was sending out shoots; and now he was going to plant out his clerk and cousin Malek, lately arrived from Lebanon.

"I came here to spy out the land about a year ago," Bishara went on. "No more plantations than on the back of my hand. Forest everywhere, or wretched corn-crop. Blacks in untouched state, tricky, I can tell you—and savage! I came in a litter, and they greeted me with showers of spears. . . . They've made the road since then. There aren't any Whites as yet, but it isn't a wilderness now : it's a boulevard! Look you : they've been clearing the ground ; you won't see any of this beastly yucca anywhere now—it's a regular pump for sucking the soil dry, it's a real prussic acid maker. . . . And since I've been buying their kola, the natives eat maize, 'maize the staff of the people,' as they say ; and that means there's no danger now of your having to feed on fried ants and bananas ; they no longer stuff the marriageable girls and nobody else ; everybody waxes fat hereabouts. The women are buying themselves

drawers. Long live progress, my lad! You're getting here in time for the Golden Age: these monkeys are no longer dangerous, and they're not yet drunkards."

Malek took a breath. The palms reminded him of Syria. In spite of a rather tragic sunset gashing a leaden sky, and spreading outward in orange wounds with violet edges, he felt something harmonious in this village steeped in the tide of evening. Young girls of rippling bronze were coming back from the water-carrying; the women were preparing the palm-oil stew. The men were talking, and talking.

"Don't pay more than sevenpence for a chicken!" counselled Bishara.

The lorry had stopped in the middle of the market-place, beneath the pow-wow tree, as if on the edge of a void. There the road ended. The Levantine, in a suit no longer white, was urging on the Blacks without pausing for rest.

"No good! It's four sacks I want! And you, eight! You, twelve! Always go on—no Sundays!"

But this did not keep him from deluging his junior with advice.

"Stir about! See the chiefs. Pretend to know the Koran by heart; doesn't matter they're being fetish people—they've seen them doing that amongst the Moors and it impresses them."

The notables arrived, lieges offering their lord some greenish milk in a calabash.

"Away with you, you and your milk! I no want catch cholera! You bring kola, kola, more kola!"

Then Bishara called them back, and named them to Malek, offering them bars of salt and plugs of tobacco.

The kola-nuts were heaping up in purple piles, the colour of dried rose-leaves. In a week they would be on the market, far away from here, at Bamako, ready for grinding between Sudanese jaws.

"You're master here, my boy. You can finger your nose at the Government."

The nuts could be heard rolling noisily on to the floor of the lorry like wooden balls.

"Don't make the niggers do bananas ; it don't pay. But cocoa, that's all right."

Malek watched the village people passing. One by one, skulls came into view beneath the tilt of the awning, each loaded with its basket of kola. Stupid faces, matching the importance of their work ; cheeks of smooth brown, striped with five vertical parallels ; three spots of tattooing between the eyebrows ; heavy lips made heavier by the splinter of chipped quartz that traversed them. Only the eyes were alive, darting sideways, showing the yellow sclerotics ; they tried without moving their heads to stare this new White in the face—or at least this intermediary between Black and White which the Levantine represents for the natives. Malek noticed the women's necks, hung with red beads ; their habit of chewing white earth disgusted him. Apart from that these negroes seemed to him very much as Bishara described them—gentle, timid, faithful to the soil, and of low intelligence. No, not a young race, a senile race. As the administrator of Danane had told Malek when he had been to ask the necessary authorisation to settle here, he would not find a clan in an intact condition at Krou, but a residue of inferior and conquered tribes who had fled before the northern invasions

and sought refuge in these forests. The missionaries had been disheartened at seeing these natives sink back into error after accepting baptism only to be able to taste salt; and consequently they had neglected them.

"Not much fun here," said Malek.

"Well, I say you'll have a good enough time here, my boy. If you have any difficulties, don't waste your time with the village chief, the one who's been chosen by the French. Try to find out the real secret chief, the fetishman. In a month I'll send you the truck. It's a hundred. . . ."

The engine started up abruptly and interrupted him.

"It's a hundred tons I'll need next time—do you understand?"

His hoarse voice faded away, but he was still swinging his arm in the air to indicate that everything must be garnered in. For it was he whom the blacks called "Bishara-the broom-of-riches."

II

Malek rose at dawn, before the village. He lit the lamp. He was aware of his solitude, and felt ill at ease on his camp-bed in the midst of the trade ledgers, canned foods, and the choking smell of new cotton-stuffs. His furniture consisted of a folding-chair, a water-jug, and an ostrich egg hanging from the ceiling. He had nothing to do now but make his fortune. . . . He washed his face and went out.

The hamlet was buried in communal sleep. Between them all, these Blacks had but one breath. So extreme was the prostration that it was more like an epidemic than a

blessing. It was obvious that after centuries of sleeplessness, always on the look-out, in terror of raids, treachery, poisoned arrows, traps, these people were now making up for lost time and sleeping their fill. Colours and sounds were still in abeyance, and a few vampire-bats still flitted to and fro, incredulous of the dawn. Malek had the impression of there being only two characters on this stage—himself, and the village. The morning breeze stirred a curtain that was just beginning to show blue in the darkness. The Levantine lost himself in the mazes of these rush lanes—for the huts were joined each to each by screens supported on stakes. His foot caught on one of those small tripods of white wood which serve as seats. A dog barked. He crossed the market square: some black lambs were asleep in a hut perforated like a cage. A narrow bottle-neck led him outside. On either hand were yawning panther-traps, the beams upright, watching for a prey that had not come. The Levantine enjoyed a walk through the plantations. They had something honest and suburban that was reassuring to him. The eye rejoiced in resting on something other than the shapeless. After all the bewilderment of the forests, how good it was to contemplate these squared fields edged with their straight trenches! For those who travel in forests the sight of banana-trees in alignment always suggests the proximity of human beings, and they heartened him like a flag. The soft green rice-swamps, the domesticated beauty of the cocoa-plants, the vanquished veterans of trees with amputated limbs—all heralded progress. What a contrast to the infernal swarming and corruption of the Liberian forest! Behind him, the road, a good fairy, linked him with Danane, with the world: in

front of him lay the unknown ; in a different way from some points of the coast, Liberia is the secret land, barred to progress, with no lines of communication, peopled by the last of the savages, folk of evil repute. . . .

It was a good hour to be alive. As soon as the sun had shown above the ridge of trees Malek returned to the village in good spirits. It was ringed by a circle of the trunks of dead palms, the sap of which had been drunk ; they looked like empty chalices. In his absence everything had woken up. He heard the deep musical voices of the men, untying the cattle, driving out the little hump-backed bulls the colour of burnt brushwood. He heard the shrill falsetto voices of the matrons. With tossing breasts, kneeling before a slab of schist, they were pounding tubers with large cobble-stones. Slung on their backs, sleeping infants were bobbed up and down. Girls were sweeping out the doorways with soft switches of palm. Malek went through as far as the last enclosure, exchanging the smell of the dank forest for the animal stench of the Blacks.

To work ! Hunters and smiths would go to the plough like the rest ; the boys, instead of pulling at their protruding navels, and the little girls, instead of musing with one finger in the mouth, and the other further down, would all go gathering nuts. Fetishmen and notables, off to work ! And things would hum ! He'd know how to make them buy trash, and get them into debt too. . . . For his own part, Malek wouldn't spend a penny here, not on any pretext. He wasn't here to have a good time, he was here to get rich. Rice and bananas—cooked bananas if raw ones gave him colic. And in three months, by all that's Levantine, he'd have his car, a real American car, to make the

natives stare and raise a dust-storm round the regional administrator.

Malek sold. He found it at once easy and difficult to sell to the Blacks : easy, because they do not know the value of money, and difficult, because they have no needs. Men smeared with red earth, as if powdered with the cocoa they were planting, brought him their slips for ten days' work. Their big eyes tried to choose from among the products of the West ; and at last they fixed on a bottle of Coty, which they instantly uncorked and poured over their heads and shoulders. Malek bought back the empty bottles, being aware that in certain villages of the colony empty bottles serve as currency. "It's the old stock we lose on," Bishara used to say. And true enough, fashion in these forest recesses had caprices that Europe does not know. There were violent, absurd crazes for certain articles that soon ran out of stock, while others would suddenly be so despised that no cut in prices would help them.

* * * * *

For some time Malek had noticed that, although the Blacks did not crowd round the store in smaller numbers, they were slower in buying. He consulted his cash-books : no doubt about it, things were slackening. He had been at Krou for almost three months. Perhaps his customers were getting tired of always seeing the same goods ? But there was also the fact that every day fewer bags of kola were delivered to him. He went over to the plantations in hope of discovering absentees ; but everybody was at work, although they seemed slack, like prisoners in barracks. The

rhythm of their collective life was being silently clogged, although its movements were unchanged. Malek kept his ears cocked, like a chauffeur listening to noises in the engine; the motor was turning over, but only just . . . In his anxiety he consulted his boys, questioned the women who were brought to him at night, and asked his buyers about it: "No, not understand. Ev'ryt'ing like befo'. Not tired, no." He went to the village headman, who raised his panther-skin cap, accepted the salt, and replied with meaningless phrases in a small fluty voice. Perhaps some epidemic? But nobody was laid up, and the medicine-man remained unfrequented by clients, peaceably smoking his pipe on his parted knees under the pow-wow tree.

One cannot live alone like this for days on end, in privacy with a village, and feeling oneself closed within its magnetic circuit, without coming to feel every oscillation of its currents. To know things Malek no longer needed - to ask . . . Obviously, it was a strike by sabotage. And the results were leaving their mark in the warehouse; hardly any sacks now. Production had dropped by three-quarters. Malek lowered his prices: no reaction from the village. The Levantine was not to be beaten; he announced sales, exhibitions, prize-offers. His audience increased by so many idlers that things were no longer business, but simply a spectacle.

"A sort of puncture . . ." he noted, "nearly flat."

* * * * *

Malek in his turn began to feel depressed.

Isolation was weighing on him. Bishara had sent up

his lorry for kola only once ; for two months nobody had come back to Krou. The French are not exactly enthusiastic towards the Levantines ; but all the same it was a comfort down at Danane to see some white faces at the apéritif hour. Of course there was nothing to fear here ; but security is only one material thing . . . What was the meaning of this new solitude, this strange desert in which he, Malek, could feel the ground giving under his feet and the horizon always slipping back and back ? Strictly speaking, these negroes were a society, so long as one could reason with them, exercise authority, pushing along somehow and being understood ; but against this dumb withdrawal, this dead resistance, what could be done ? It looked like pretence. What ban had been laid on these Blacks ? The further things went on, the more circumspect and ceremonious he found them. Malek found himself unoccupied, and spent his days reading on his bed :

“ I believe the slackness is going to catch me too. What an epidemic of dawdling ! ”

And thereafter time flowed on without his paying heed to its passing. What was the good of keeping count of the days ? The sole occupation of the natives was coming to watch Malek brushing his teeth. A tremendous boredom oozed from everything. Lying down, Malek felt himself decomposing completely, even to his desire of making money. Eloquence itself could no longer grip his customers, so he was silent wandering in the deserted plantation.

Malek tried hard to reason with himself. These things were the ebb and flow of trade. The fields might be deserted by workers who seemed to have mutinied under the orders of some invisible chief, but everything might pick

up again; one had to reckon on necessity, on greed.

And then his melancholy seized him again. You can fight against something, but can you fight against repose? Can you come to grips with quietude? There is no remedy that will put a stop to peace.

Entr'acte . . . The curtain of the forest was dropping on him, on his energy, even on his memory. Already the cocoanut-trees by the edge of the forest were in their death-agony under the shrouding lianas; the parasites were about to fling their foul rags over this fair garden. The landscape was altering: the trees seemed to be moving forward, gaining back the tract they had lost, and beginning to bear down on him; the village was shrinking, smaller and smaller . . .

III

At Danane, meanwhile, Bishara was selling. Or to be more precise, he was on the look-out. For he had observed that the lingering timidity of the negroes kept them from venturing right inside a shop, and accordingly he went out to meet them—with that distinctively Oriental art of monopolising the public pathway, so persistent among Levantine traffickers that they are managing to annex the sidewalks of upper Park Avenue in New York, the pavements of the Rue de Rivoli in Paris. Bishara spied on a customer from behind his netting; as soon as he felt a nibble, he struck, and held tight to the end.

Thinking of Malek (which was not often), Bishara began

to swear. The creature didn't send news very often; the lorry he had sent had come back half-empty, more than two months ago. There was only one Levantine alive in the wide world who was no trader, and a cruel fate had made that one his partner! Twenty-five vouchers for goods rotting up there in a hole somewhere near Liberia! And kola! Kola, sir, that bullion, that cash-box reviver, that tonic for thin wallets, that medicine for anæmic bank-balances! Kola, which is now for the Ivory Coast what cocoa was for Nigeria, or bars of salt for the Sudan!

* * * * *

Bishara had taken a month off. He had just arrived from the coast, in a new suit of clothes, with his hair cut, looking like the Governor himself.

"And what about Malek?" he asked on his return.

Nobody had any news from the frontier. And this drove Bishara into a frenzy of restlessness. He was exasperated by the flight of the Blacks before realities, the way in which things themselves vanished into nothingness unless they were ceaselessly under surveillance, the immediate disappearance of whatever one had created, the filchings of fortune in this damnable country. Nothing . . . no . . . none . . . nothingness . . . nobody . . . dead—that was Africa. It was time to go up to Krou . . . He'd be there already if his damned lorry had not been stuck broken down at Bamako.

On the day fixed for his setting-off, Bishara saw a White sitting near the store—a White no longer recognisable by his colour, for he seemed to have come out of a coal-box,

but by his bushy beard, a creature in tatters, filthy as a Moor. Under the battered helmet he recognised Malek, or Malek's ghost, prostrate with fatigue and starvation.

"It's you! Looking like that! What the hell are you doing here?"

Malek stared at him and simply said: "Eat . . ."

"How did you come here? Are you deaf?"

He answered vaguely:

"On foot. I'm hungry."

"Well, my lad, you must have been a precious long time on the road?"

Malek counted on his fingers.

"I took six . . . seven . . . eight nights."

He was counting by nights now, like a Black! And like a Negro, he was hungry!

Round them formed a circle of black and blue, story-seekers of the market-place, women who hawked false news, all the stock figures of the African bazaars. The Levantines tried to get out of this pool of Negroes, trampling booths underfoot, smashing the bowls of grey butter, breaking the pottery; through the rancid tumult and the frightful stink of dried fish, Indian hemp and warm bodies, they at last reached Bishara's dwelling. They were alone, behind the netting.

"It's all finished . . . it's all up . . ." was all that Malek kept repeating.

"Steady on!" And the goods?

No reply.

"The plantations?"

He shook his head.

"Nobody dared to work any more . . . Niggers all mad."...

"God! I'll go up and take the guts out of them! But first of all I wish you'd . . ."

But there was nothing to wish, for Malek was dozing off. It was folly to ask this repatriated skeleton to tell his adventures, or finish his administrative accounts. The very bread dropped from his fingers in his fatigue. He had not had the courage to chew his sardines; he had been content to swallow their oil.

"I'm safe and sound," sighed Malek.

"To hell with that! What about the goods? Do you hear?"

No doubt about it; nothing could be done with this dotard vagabond. He was asleep.

It was night when he awoke. Bishara was waiting for his cousin on the edge of sleep, indifferent to the pathetic.

"What about the goods?"

"Stop it . . . mustn't sell any more . . ." said the other.

He sank into silence again.

Bishara suspected Malek of having been knocked on the head with a bamboo.

"Don't send me back there. . . . I want to go back to Syria."

"Quinine, do you want? Are you sick? A Levantine going home—who ever heard of such a thing?"

"No, but you mustn't fly in the face of . . ."

Malek seemed more and more oppressed as darkness fell. In his honour, and out of curiosity, Bishara lit the acetylene lamp, and shook it. A white sunlight lit up the shattered Oriental seated rambling on his bed.

Bishara was on the point of bursting out, but so weary

and disheartened did the other appear that he restrained himself.

"Come along, talk. Are you frightened? I know what Africa is. Did you get a knock on the head?"

"There's nothing the matter with me, myself . . . but if you saw what it's like there! It's frightful . . ."

"And the goods?"

"Nothing left," Malek declared.

"Earthquake? War? Fire? It's covered by insurance in any case."

"Nothing left," repeated young Malek stupidly.

Bishara had to obtain his confession word by word.

The other could not tell how the thing had really begun. He had only noticed that the natives, well tamed though they were at first, were gradually turning queer in their ways, and quitting their work. . . . Nobody in the plantation. . . . He—he had stayed on . . . there was a business about seeing something.

"What was it you saw?"

"To begin with, I saw them sleeping in the daytime. So much so that I thought of sleeping sickness. They were just laid out where they stood, as if they'd got drunk on palm wine, snoring on their legs . . ."

"Looks like it was infectious!"

". . . I questioned them. They didn't look bad, but they looked as if *something* was wrong. They brought each other along, dragging their feet. They lied. If I pressed them with questions, they were slippery, and answered; 'Me got tired head.'"

"Idiot! You ought to have got the women to chatter!"

"Even the women were dumb. They sniggered, and

wriggled their haunches, and scratched their armpits, and did nothing but spit out the herb juice from between their filed teeth."

"And the children?"

"I patted the brats on the head like the Dakar deputies do—but it was no good—nothing at all. The parents had put water in their mouths to make them hold their tongues."

Was it a secret tom-tom? He had thought as much. . . . In any case, these niggers seemed to be in dread of something which must not be named. In vain had he offered drinks to the fetish-men, and even to the red leather amulets hung round their necks. His inquiries made people look embarrassed, and they looked away in the direction of the forest, over towards Liberia. . . . And Malek added that he too had guessed it was over in that direction they'd have to look. . . . "When you live alone without anyone to talk to, you become like an animal. . . . You don't understand things, but you feel them, with your nose and your skin and all your body." He was warned, yes: but he didn't know what about. . . .

"One night I put my head outside," he continued. "The moon had just risen. . . . I went through the village. It was empty! Cleaned out, absolutely—as if the natives had been led off captive, as if the place were bewitched. . . . Nothing but roosting fowls and baaing lambs. . . . A silence that stunned you. Not a departure: a flight, a migration. . . . I went back to sleep. Next morning at waking time they'd all returned, brought back to life again. . . . The next night they vanished again. . . . So then I took my Colt and went out, determined to be in the secret myself this time."

No, he wasn't brave : a Levantine never takes a needless risk. But he refused to be the only one who wasn't in the know. . . . A town has its thousands of people who are strangers to you, and you hardly care what it may think. But a village is a person ; and how can you live face to face with someone who has a secret ?

"The grass was newly trodden towards the south. Five hundred natives in Indian file leave their traces all right. I followed their trail for an hour, as far as the forest. And then the darkness beneath the trees was added to the darkness of the night, and the silence was more horrible than ever. When everything's asleep on the lagoon, there's always the mosquitoes at least ; on the rivers a fish jumps now and then. But there—nothing, nothing : a graveyard. I went on through the tree-clumps with the help of my electric torch. Judging by the time, I must be in Liberia. . . I skirted fallen trees, jumped over backwater creeks, and at last caught sight of a fire. . . . I came out of covert . . ."

* * * * *

"They were all there," he went on, "standing or squatting. Those who were in the moonlight looked blue, and those near the fire, red. No dancing ; no drums to point to a festival or a hunt ; how can I describe it ? . . . it was more like a benediction—yes, a Breton *pardon* that I once saw on the films. I stayed in my hole in the scrub and watched. In front of me was a wild cotton-tree which, after a fork, covered me with its enormous tuft. Its trunk was decorated with skulls of oxen, and it was bristling with nails."

"If you're going to be frightened of a fetish-tree !"

"Wait. . . . Just imagine this: that tree was talking! The words tumbled on to me . . . strident . . . hysterical. Impossible to understand them. . . . The village fetish-man must be the only initiate, for when the voice of the invisible being was silent, he put his ear to the ground and translated to the rest of them. I could make out his robe with its ribs of raffia, his naked chest smeared with clay and ochre, his monstrous face covered with a horned mask. . . . He spouted on and on, and all to tell them that they must support the good spirits against the bad . . . that in a few nights the people were going to take their real name . . . that then they would exchange poverty for riches, when once the sky had given a sign. . . . He held wooden stumps in his hands—you know their way—to represent the arguments of his harangue, and as it proceeded, they were pushed gradually deeper into the earth.

"As for me, I could see these niggers of mine raising their heads and watching the dark sky, as if waiting for something. . . . I was no further forward than they were, and I didn't see anything; but behind the branches, deep in the woods, when the voice rose up, I divined the presence of some extraordinary being. You could almost feel it passing, yes, physically passing through the air—a power of will. Assuredly that was the enemy, the foe whom they obeyed, the hidden master, the prompter of the strike. His jargon fell on them all, so domineering and so insolent, that even though it was incomprehensible, you could only let yourself be convinced . . . and obey . . ."

Here Malek was seized by the same impotence as at first; the same difficulty in expression; hesitations. . . . His animation died out.

But Bishara gathered that his cousin had returned to the village in the dark, behind the Blacks, guided only by the clinking of the women's anklets, in which the ball rattles imprisoned in its notch. . . . And after this Malek had gathered nothing more. Had he noticed nothing? No, not a thing: except a general over-excitement, and long speechifying on the next day under the pow-wow tree. And he had heard talk of a secret council when the old men had buried all their words in a hole in the ground, which was immediately stopped up.

"That looks bad," interrupted Bishara.

"Yes. And another serious thing was the disappearance of the women and youngsters."

"Sign of war. A revolt?"

"Not at all. That's just where I can't make it out any further, I assure you. . . . I'm certain the like of it was never seen in Africa before . . ."

Exhausted at this moment, Malek grew limper still. Weakness and sleepiness were claiming him again. Bishara was afraid of a fainting-fit, and gave him a drink.

"I walked for eight days," said the youth. "Those red ants. . . . My feet are full of jiggers."

Bishara seized the lamp, fetched water, and pounded up some cigar-butts in it to wash his feet with the decoction.

* * * * *

On the following night—he had not long to wait—Malek was roused by a formidable outburst of cries and roars, by the throb of the alarm-drums being beaten and the banging of stew-pots. He leapt out of bed. The whole village was ablaze:

"Out I went, carbine in hand. Yes, the village was burning—or more exactly, the natives were crazed and were setting fire to it. Pigs were in full flight, rushing about sideways like crabs. The cattle were caught in the kraal as in a grill, howling as they roasted. If a beast did escape, the Blacks felled it with clubs and maces. . . . All that apathy of theirs had gone, all that gloomy silence of the past few weeks ; they were exultant, they gave roars of triumph. A hell—a festival where everything was sacked. . . . They pulled down the maize granaries with ropes, and they drenched the grain. They fell upon the cotton plantings with their hatchets, and tore up the ground dressing—just like elephants ; they massacred the crops for the sheer joy of it—just like bands of monkeys.

"They were so absorbed in what they did that in their jubilation they paid no heed to me. Those who did see me had no thoughts of attacking me—on the contrary, they seemed to want me to share in their delight. . . . It was the extermination of everything that had been built up for a year back. . . . You remember where the store stood, beside the road just before you reached the village. The flames could not reach it unless they were brought over that far. They saw to that all right. Some naked children came along with brands. . . . I chased them off. . . . The corrugated iron wasn't easy to set alight, and they would have had to get right inside to the stock ; but I was there. . . . I fired in the air. But they weren't alarmed, not a bit of it ; they thought it was to show my enthusiasm, and cheered me. They picked up glowing charcoal, yes, picked it up in their hands, and carried them on to the dry palm-leaf roofs. They leapt yelling into

the brasiers, and shouted to me to go into the purifying fire. Then I tried to get free of them by hitting out with a stick. . . . They poured in like a black flood, from all sides, overturned all the stock, and began to stave in the gasoline cans. . . . I struggled to lock up the hut, but they prevented me. Otherwise they showed me no violence. If I'd resisted, they would have butchered me. No, all they wanted in their frenzy was to destroy. . . .

"Shooting stars were raining across the sky."

IV

The Danane administrator received the two Levantines in his handsome pillared residence, and Malek recapitulated his story for him. The silver-braided Frenchman at once summoned some troopers, and declared that he would go to the spot next day to make his report. Malek would go with him.

Setting off before dawn, they counted on arriving in the early afternoon. But as they were approaching, some Blacks emerged from the woods at the scream of the klaxon. Malek recognised them.

"That man's from Krou . . . that one too."

They were all harassed, and grey with ash.

They asked for food, and provisions were shared out amongst them. Every kilometre they met groups of famished refugees.

"Where are you going?"

"To Commandant. To eat."

Nothing could be got from their talk. It was always
 "No mo' b'nanas, no mo' maize . . ."

"We'll have to organise relief . . ."

Further on they met others, no less exhausted, but more intelligent. They were dying of inanition; it was their own fault, but what could be done since He had spoken? . . .

"Who's that?"

It took a long time before they could be brought to speak the word, and they uttered it only with veneration: the *goli*. The *goli* is the spirit of the wild bull who returns to the forest. The *goli*, the guardian of the tribe, is the great horned ancestor.

"And what did your *goli* command you to do?"

The *goli* had explained to them that in order to be rich, they must begin by destroying everything. They had nothing to fear, because they were a village of the elect. A night was coming when the sky would be filled with shooting stars; and it was their common destiny that would then be settled up there. For these stars are simply the arrows and spears with which the good spirits would that night be overwhelming the bad spirits. The *goli* had given them magical formulas which would put their foes to flight; and to that end they must begin by assuming a new name, and call themselves "the People of the Shooting Stars." Under the emblem of fire they would instantly prosper, but the first sacrifice must be for the fire. To destroy is to imitate fire. And the *goli* assured them that as soon as the plantations were sacked, the trees uprooted, the huts burnt down, everything would grow again that same day, nay, that very instant; water would gush up on every hand; the grain would swell like balloons; the

banana-trees would overtop the baobabs and produce all manner of foodstuffs—and not only bananas but also bicycles, trousers and musical-boxes. The grass would grow thicker, and full of fine fish. The huts would build themselves up again unaided, beginning with the roofs. Panthers would come and offer up their skins.

This was why they had obeyed, hoping for more harvests and bigger cattle. For the sake of future riches, they had killed and obliterated everything that the present offered them.

* * * * *

The Whites arrived in the evening.

Yes, the bull-headed *goli* had spoken. Nothing was left of Krou. The cotton-plants had now become skeletons, and the tallest mahogany-trees, mere stumps. Other trees had burnt standing up, black, with all their green leaves turned to red paper; like blast-furnaces, they were consuming themselves inwardly, in the pith. It was even worse in the plantations. The crumpled, yellow banana leaves fell one after the other like shreds of old dresses. The grass had vanished, and the coppices, converted into charcoal, pencilled the white uniforms with countless smears.

"I am *ru-ined*," Bishara kept saying, quite overcome. "A rising—the insurance won't come in! Africa is lost!"

"Africa is lost when you lose it," said the administrator sternly.

Lodge a complaint? Against whom? Spirits can't be

brought into the police-court. They all thought of the native proverb: "Put your grievance in your belly, it's better than taking vengeance."

The Liberian forest had closed in again on Him whose spells had seduced and obliterated this village.

Anxiety still lay like a pool over this low ground.

"The spirits abominate tree-felling, roads, seed-time—everything that weakens the magical life," concluded the administrator.

The two Levantines stared at him, the elder disconcerted, the younger stupefied. Born on the marches of Europe and Asia, they could feel within them the stirring, through all the past ages, of an Oriental sense of the marvellous that shook their commercial faith. . . .

Bishara took the defensive first. The white stock came uppermost in him.

"Blast their dirty gods!" he said. "We're going to build up again."

Krou was no more than gleaming white ashes. A few stakes of the blackened kraal still stood upright. Great circles of baked stones still showed the outlined foundations of the huts. Not a living soul was near, except one leper, pink-gloved, who ran off as they approached. The fires had gone out, but the ground was still smoking. Only the ant-hills had held out; baked where they stood, they looked like conical earthen stoves, cracked by the fire, or like phalli, erect and even now ready for the next fecundation.



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*Oh, leave these last sons of nature to pass
peacefully away upon their mother's breast !
Do not break in with your austere dogmas,
the fruit of twenty centuries of reflection, upon
their childish play. . . .*

Renan : "The Future of Science."

THE sky—calm as the sea. And beneath it, the landscape matches this pelagian image, and reproduces the ocean bottom. A cliff rises up like a tidal bore of stone ; at its foot the ground-swell of sand dies down ; and the gum-trees are like madrepores, like black coral. There is no fresh water ; and in that too it is like the ocean. The roadway from the French Sudan climbs zigzag upwards and takes an impetus at the summit of the promontory before finding itself back again in another plain, several hundred feet lower, that of the Upper Volta. Everything is quivering in the heat and growing hotter with the day ; in this hell, where neither cars nor horses nor mules ever venture, nothing is lacking but flames.

The nearer you come to the cliff, the more you see how it is riddled with caves and the borings of natural wells ; and the sides of these are themselves pierced horizontally by tunnels leading to underground chambers. With the help of ropes you can slide down into them.

There was something moving at the bottom of these funnels. Something enormous was alive in here. From the landscape it borrowed its glaucous colour, from the bossy rocks its hydra form.

II

On the village square, between the cubes of clay, like that of swallow's nests, and the blue geometrical patterning of their shadows, King Mongku had been dancing for nearly an hour in the full violence of the midday sun. Like a wheel spattered with its used-up grease, a circle of those of his black subjects who lived in the village was formed round him. An enormous man, made heavier than ever by his velvet robes, the sovereign bore a burden on his back—a kind of huge flask, of two colours, weighing nearly a hundredweight; it was filled with earth, and he held it by its neck, both hands bent up over his head. He was sweating like a proletarian, dripping steadily from the cushions of his stomach. His chest heaved up and dropped down. His panting was audible. His legs, which normally could only just support this vast tun of tripe, were wavering under this added strain; his feet could hardly lift themselves any longer.

In this place the most trifling activity of the Blacks is helped on by the rhythm of drums, or at least by a song; but the dance of this monarch was proceeding before a totally dumb audience. A heavy silence, growing more oppressive every minute. This reel was more like the heavy-footed progress of an old horse turning a mill. The

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flexible back, with its string of vertebrae showing, became hideous. . . . The man was sinking, lost in the maze of his own steps, crushed under his own privileges, for he would find his authority shaken in proportion as his muscles gave way. Thus willed the rites. In this annual ceremony the potentate had to justify in his people's eyes his right to omnipotence. To these fresh imaginations it would seem incomprehensible that a chief who could not support this burden would agree to uphold the State unaided. Only at the price of the sufferings he was himself capable of enduring did he obtain domination for one more year. If his distress ended after an hour, if he put his enemies to shame, he would be offered sacrifices and gifts and many other compensations. But if he fell, or acknowledged his defect, then woe betide him! The judgment of the people condemned him forthwith, for the witch-doctors declared that weakness in the sovereign would soon be reflected in a shrinking of soil and harvests.

And already King Mongku was staggering. . . .

III

In the depths of that hole in the rocks, eyes growing used to the darkness were beginning to make out that the creature moving in there was an immense snake; they could see its scaly body, its green and yellow stripes. Curled up at first, it uncoiled, and even truncated itself—for each fragment of this serpent was a man, a naked Negro, painted with smears that recalled the camouflage on

guns. Their faces were hidden behind masks of snakeskin with dark spectacles.

It was the custom of the secret society of the Serpent-Men to meet in the depths of this cliff, far from prying or spying eyes. The rocks had once been inhabited by the whole people, but nowadays they were deserted, since the French, after a real war to dislodge these troglodytes, had scattered them here and there over the plain.

In their centre the spokesman was haranguing, his hoarse voice dried still more by the west wind.

"The hour has come to bid farewell to Him whose hand has lost its strength . . ." (Cheers). "We no longer want Him who was so long our milk and our honey, for milk turns sour and honey ferments . . ."

It had been manifest on the previous evening, when he had danced before the people, that King Mongku's powers were failing; but he could not be dethroned without the secret society to which he belonged giving its consent. And that was why his brothers had met without him that day. Prudently they were acting at a distance, for all kings are descendants of the sun, and their gaze can burn.

The masked orator fell silent, opened a sack, and peered into its opening. . . . Suddenly his arm shot inside, and with muscles swelling from the straining of his wrist, he drew slowly out towards him a python. He was gripping back its head. As soon as he got out, the creature tried to envelop the arm, but the Black stamped a foot on his tail to prevent him from getting vantage on the ground, and then forcibly unwound the blind squeezing rings. Both

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showed the same torsion, both the same marbling of the body : it was like the battle of a caduceus. . . . Instead of showing his scaly back, the serpent now displayed the sleek yellow skin of his belly ; his eyes glittered with rage ; he was vanquished. The Ophite unclenched his fist and let the reptile drop limp to the ground. The brethren rushed forward to see that letter the rings had formed on the sand. . . . The god declared for the death of the Invincible One.

IV

In his palace with towers of sun-baked earth King Mongku administered justice, sitting on his throne—a panther in white wood, ocellated with a branding iron.

The walls of the audience-chamber are decked with antelope skulls and photographs of Parisian actresses or aviators ; behind the sovereign hangs his full-length portrait by a pupil of the Beaux-Arts who had held a colonial scholarship. This immediate duplication of the man and his image is tiring and disturbing to the eye, but one can now contemplate the prince directly. His face is fatter than any face one has ever seen—a hoop of darkness with the single slit of the mouth. The depths of his eyes, closed by pads of fat, show his cruelty, his intelligence, his guile. He is short of breath, and the enfeebled pump of his heart has no longer strength to drive the tide of blood to the farthest limits of the sluggish body. His lips open seldom for words, but are often parted for the passage of pots of mealie beer. It is only the prescribed usage that

forces on him these gallons of fermented liquor, these excesses of table and bed ; custom demands that he whom the people has raised up shall be thus kept subject as a dummy king.

In his violet velvet robes, the same colour as the chasubles of Lent, the tyrant looks like some priest of the Black Mass. He has only the trappings of omnipotence. The nominal proprietor of this desert of worthless land, in his mud fortress where the goats sleep at night on the terraces, safe from the lions, he is only the last vestige of a great Negro dynasty which once held sway from Timbuctoo to Seville. To-day he lives in his hole, isolated, so to speak, amid his two hundred wives and eighteen hundred children, defended by old iron cannons with Islamic amulets tied round their mouths.

* * * * *

The court was held at his feet, on either side of the steps of the throne. The pure-featured pages, with their leg-rings of brass, were clothed in white like women ; and like women too they had their hair dressed in rigid, undulating crests. The pleasing eagerness of their features was joined with that stiffness of the bodily limbs which one sees in those painted wooden figures of Negroes who stand as torch-bearers at the foot of Venetian staircases. Through the open windows behind them could be seen the neutral tint, the nameless putty, of the walls, against which stood out the blue of cotton stuffs or the red of a fez. These were the dwellings of the women, the fat, invisible wives, shut up for long sleeps, broken by strident quarrels and long spells of hair-plucking.

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Since the morning King Mongku has been administering justice, that is to say, has been collecting taxes ; the vertical sun urges a prompt siesta. Pages are playing on viols. Squatting ministers submit accounts. Behind them are the rain-makers, chests bare in raffia robes, and the great fetish-men likewise, followed by those dwarfs who come from far off, from the country where the cranes go, and only communicate with each other by bird-calls. The eunuchs stand at the back, with shaven heads, and faces replete with prudence, like dried-up old women.

* * * * *

King Mongku places a gold-broidered skull-cap on his head, and spits to ward off evil. The audience is over. The bystanders hide their faces on the ground, and through their midst, saluted by horsehair oriflammes, the huge puffing monster returns to his apartments, stomach first, his hanging cheeks like soft pumpkins. . . .

Behold him seated on his bed, such a bed as had to be ordered from Dakar to be able to bear his weight. They are fanning him, and he graciously accepts the relief. The mirror of the wardrobe is stripped of its veil—for only the royal features may be reflected in it—and he looks at himself, passing a hand over his temples with their single adornment of one scar on the lefthand side. . . . Which wife is on duty to-day ? He is told her name. He signals to one of the pages who has remained seated on the floor—the one with the armlets of pink copper. And having, like all Negroes, a passion for stimulants, he orders some hemp. . . . He is sweating ; they sponge his skin like a newly calked boat with the pitch gleaming.

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The page returns, kneels, and offers the pounded grain on a plate with protestations of respect. With servility, he stretches his lissome figure at the foot of the bed, a body crowned by its narrow skull and heightened still further by that hair-dressing of a young beauty. On his rug of white wool he watches, motionless but alert, his gaze like the forked tongue of the serpent.

And now the room, where a cool darkness is bottled even at high noon, like precious water in an alcaraza, is flooded with an immense torpor, a universal surrender to sleep. . . .

Suddenly the master sits up. What was that cry? Breath seems to fail him, like a fish out of water. He complains of the bitter taste in his mouth. . . . The witch-doctors are summoned. The curtains are immediately raised. The pages help King Mongku out of bed; but they lose hold of him, and he tumbles on all fours on the mat, like a Black woman about to bring forth.

And then he sinks down with his face on the floor—dead.

V

The succession stood open like an abyss. There was not one heir; there were ten thousand. Usage insisted that the people should be kept in ignorance of their king's demise until the official proclamation of the new sovereign. The most that transpired was a rumour in the neighbouring village of an indisposition; but from that he would surely recover, what with all these convulsions of the witch-

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doctors, and all that firing of long flintlocks at evil spirits which the soldiery carried on from dawn. . . .

At the palace, the sovereign seemed still to be alive. His red velvet robe and his round gold hat were seen furtively passing ; at meal-times, his favourite foods went into his room, and the plates came out empty. His voice was heard administering justice, and his writing could still be read on the letters addressed to the local administrator. The men who had embalmed him, smoking his body over a trench in the earth where a fire of green woods was kept going day and night, held a secret pow-wow over the forthcoming election.

While the eunuchs were on the look-out for alliances and preparing public opinion, the successor to the throne had virtually been decided on. It was he who already filled the place of the deceased, imitating his speech, his gestures, his clumsy walk ; at night he slept in his bed, and possessed in succession all the women of the harem, his own mother included.

There was dancing every night, by firelight ; the ground shook ; shadows and gleams, shouts, grimaces. The drums muttered in the hope of bringing back the dead monarch : a conventional hope—wishes of mere politeness in which nobody believed.

VI

Yet King Mongku did come back. The witch-doctors, a few hours later, had seen his double lie down beside the

corpse—for the double is an ethereal personality drawing its substance from the body and dying soon after it. And what now remained was the most formidable part of the man, and the part that was hardest to satisfy—his soul. More than once the late king had been seen disguised as an eagle, or a monkey, or a serpent. However, was he not enclosed within this urn, sealed with stones dropped down from heaven? Had not his blood been poured into a jar beside it, well stoppered-up so that it should not go bad? The greater number of the brethren, men belonging to the palace, had buried it with their own hands. But souls have their own path; and although this one might certainly leave no footsteps—as was made sure by a vigorous sweeping of the dust round the funerary vase—this crowned witch-doctor showed himself more redoubtable than ever. To the mysteries of the sect of which the sovereign had been a member, there was added the still greater mystery of death, in which he was the sole initiate. The witch-doctors, like the living, form only a plebs in comparison with the aristocracy of the dead. From the peak of this new royalty, from which no ordeal could thrust him, the former King Mongku was setting them all at defiance. Nay more, he was threatening his erstwhile companions; and those among them who were medicine-men were fully aware of the peril, the malign principle, with which they had to deal. Disasters showed their omens. Sheep and dogs let their throats be slit at the sacrifice without a sound—an evil presage. . . . The Serpent-Men, still through the agency of such of their brethren as had access to the palace, had the dead man's clothing burnt, his toilet objects likewise. . . . Vain efforts: for that very night, from the summit of his

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dry mud tower, the sentinel saw him returning in the form of a hyena. A huge beast with a broad human face, howling without pause and advancing without fear. . . . After this there was a general interdict on uttering the royal name, in order to rob this hostile soul of starting-points in the darkness, to deprive him of his nocturnal civic status. But in vain : before long every one of them could see flames wandering two or three feet above the ground, buffeting women, and toppling children over. Manifestly, the deceased was unable to find repose. And with that, all sense of security was disappearing.

Then the Serpent-Men resolved to make their old comrade taste of the fruit of forgetfulness, and to render him for ever incapable of harm, by the offer of the finest dwelling they had at their disposal.

VII

The death of King Mongku was officially proclaimed. At the palace, preparations were made to carry out the deceased's final toilet. The gravediggers were summoned, who wash the corpses, and break their leg-bones, to make sure that they will not rise again. . . .

When the great jar was opened it was seen to be empty. The chief attendant of the bedchamber spoke :

"The mysteries must remain mysteries," he said.

To unveil the funeral shrines, is to profane them still further. They all went in dread of death. . . . So a

mummy in the sovereign's effigy was laid in his place on the bed.

The mourning women, only awaiting the signal, emerged from their huts in surprise. They uttered a cry sharper and more sustained than that of black monkeys, ripped their flesh with the bottoms of bottles; they tore off their marble amulets, and even their old footless stockings rolled round their calves like woollen rings; the dull, hollow sound of the mourning drums rallied the populace, and the men showed themselves in war-array, their ankles decked with iron bells, spears in their hands, heads girt round with shells, loins with green reeds.

They proceeded towards the citadel to bring the well-beloved the food necessary for his last journey. Village chiefs came with calabashes full of milk, salt, and white cocks. First they all stopped at the entrance to purify themselves. Then they went into the back courtyard to see a curious sight—two heads set upon the ground, and talking. They belonged to two body-servants, buried alive to the neck in sand for some days past, and awaiting death. The royal family had charged them with commissions for the beyond, where they would be called upon to serve their master; so people came to listen to them repeating by heart the sentences which had been taught them so that they could reproduce them as soon as they reached the other world.

Night came on, and was one great cry. Every caste was striving to rise superior to the others by the fervour of its despair; each deputation sought to attract the attention of the notables and favourites by the excess of its grief. Towards midnight a funeral chorus was heard, sung by

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hunters in bark robes and by blacksmiths in nail armour. One part of it extolled the goodness and power of the potentate :

O ! O ! he was the well. . . .
O ! O ! he was the victory. . . .
O ! O ! O ! Our father !
Closed, alas, his golden eyes. . . .

But the other half—an oblique homage to the successor—contradicted this eulogy with censure likewise chanted :

Ah ! Ah ! Ah ! Ah !
Ah ! the mighty is overthrown !
Light our hearts, for he is far.
Hey ! Ah ! Ah ! Ah !
We are left on river's edge. . . .

Triumphant, all gleaming with paint and new garments, King Mongku had escaped corruption and seemed to have vanquished death. Between the hard hands of the wooden image, the witch-doctors came and placed a viol. He would carry it with him into the tomb, to bear witness that he rejoiced in his entry to the other world.

VIII

Light coloured shapes moved away into the night ; one by one they emerged from the rocks, and slipped off into that topsy-turvy landscape. At arm's length—in those

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petrol cans which serve as cooking vessels—they carried off a steaming stew ; its pieces had lain soaking for several days between layers of pimento, and it was easy for teeth to tear the meat from the bones. . . . Squatting, the Serpent-Men were eating their king, “ the goat with no horns ” as they called human flesh amongst themselves. In the silence of the frozen night, their Negro guts, used to hunger as they were to excess, were being gorged. Swathed in their white wollen wraps, they showed only their polished heads, with the incisors darting out from them. . . . He who had so often been appealed to for authorisation to hasten the end of some idiot old man, was now in his turn disappearing. . . . They gulped his eyes. They even withstood the delight of preserving the dried hands for knucklebone ornaments, so great was their desire to obliterate every trace of this dead man who proved so hostile to the living. A serpent, he was returning to the caste of the serpents, and now was merely one with his friends. Down went this well-spiced meat, and at the same time his soul was engulfed in these bellies, these hot tombs. . . .

Having assimilated their portion of royalty, the devourers came down again, infused with a superhuman force. They dived. The stratified cliffs plunged down into darkness. They came down from crag to crag, leaping with glad shouts from rock to rock, until they reached the plain. And then they were silent. The sand muffled their footsteps.

THE END

